

By Swami Paratparananda

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Man is a gregarious animal. He wants associates; he wants companions; he must have society. Rare is he who can live by himself. Why? Because man has been made so, created so. The Lord created man with the senses going outward therefore he perceives, seeks things outside, ¹ says the *Kathopanishad*. His delights are outside of himself. Alone he is afraid of several things — of robbers, if he has money; of life, if he has enemies; of himself, if he has a bad conscience and so on. A man with a tormented conscience likes to lose himself in a crowded place — crowded with activities as well as people.

Again, man wants to share his thoughts, his sorrows, his joys with others. Aye his joy too, in a sense. For where is the man who can say that he will not share some good news, that gives him happiness, with another who is likely to appreciate his talents, or envy his success? In sorrow and in disease, man really needs somebody, who would sympathise with him, who would feel for him; for want of this succour sometimes men have been seen to lose all faith in humanity and turn unfeeling, unappreciating brutes, nay, they may even be driven to insanity or may become hardened criminals. History has a number of incidents which go to prove this.

Psychological investigations, in which America has fairly advanced, show that even babies languish and die for want of sympathy and love. They instinctively feel — though their minds may not have developed to grasp intellectually what they feel — that they are not wanted. The very atmosphere, perhaps, becomes oppressive to them. This is not merely a conjecture. It can be inferred by your own experience in life. In our everyday life we meet with such situations. You are invited to a party, because you happen to be in some way related to the people, who are giving it, but in reality they will be glad if you abstained from attending. You do not know it yet. You go to the function and immediately you regret your action, for you instinctively feel that you are an unwanted person there, though you came not uninvited. Perhaps a dead silence of a minute or two at your entry, in the otherwise gay atmosphere, tells you that; or something like it happens and you become aware of the true state of affairs. It may sometimes be suffocating for you and perhaps you wish you were not there at all. On the other hand others at some other place would, probably, wish that you went to them even uninvited and felt yourself at home with them. Such instances show that an atmosphere is not merely physical but something more. And this other atmosphere acts on the psychic being of man as the outer climate and atmosphere acts on his body. The psychic being in man can be and is influenced by the environment he lives in, by the company he keeps. ‘Tell me with whom thou art found, and I will tell thee who thou art,’ said the German poet-philosopher Goethe. This has been the verdict of not only him but also of others before and after him.

So, it has been a universal experience, all through the ages, all through the climes and all throughout the world that, but for a few exceptions, all men desire company; and that association influences them as sure as milk acted upon by acid transforms itself into curd.

That being so it behoves all to take good care with what type of people they associate.

II

Spiritual personages have emphasized the need of keeping holy company, on all aspirants. In ancient India it was easily done; everything fitted like a glove, on account of the traditional method of education — of living with the Guru. Every Brahmana boy was required to study *Brahma Vidya* under a competent preceptor, otherwise he was called a friend of a Brahmana and not as a Brahmana. This appellation, *Brahma-bandhu*, was not a coveted title, rather it was a way of ridicule, a derogatory epithet. The parents were very conscious that their children did not become mere friends of the Brahmanas.

At an early age of eight, the boys were sent to the preceptor's house and they studied under him all he could teach and imbibed his way of life as well. But there was nothing in this relationship, of teacher and disciple of that time, which could be termed as regimentation. Where love and affection was the guiding principle, harshness was only a semblance. The teacher bestowed upon his disciples as much affection as he showered on his own children. This period of life was one of austerity, of learning, of studentship — *brahmacharya*. Those who passed through the training could rise to every occasion in their future life. They had, neither difficulty, nor vacillation in facing the most trying circumstances with equanimity, for their feet were set on firm ground. This was the basic on which life was built in ancient days. And in this set-up, holy company was a foregone conclusion.

III

But, as it happens, this ideal could not strictly be followed in later periods. Yet the idea that holy company was a necessity of spiritual life was indisputably accepted by one and all. There is a common saying in the Sanskrit language, which brings out this idea. Translated it means: 'With the benefit of holy company one attains to the state of non-attachment. With non-attachment one goes beyond infatuation; and going beyond it one grasps the steadfast Truth, the Ultimate Reality; attaining It one is freed here while living; one becomes a *Jivanmukta*.' This was not a cant but the living experience of hundreds of people. Even to this day instances occur when a touch of, or a glance from a holy man transforms a person. Swami Vivekananda used to say that spirituality is a thing that can be given like a flower or fruit, by those who have realized God. Jesus Christ took as his foremost disciples fishermen and said: 'Come and follow me and I shall make you fishers of men'. And that he really did. A servant boy of a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna by association with the Master became one of the wonders of spiritual history — we mean Swami Adbhutananda. What great heights of spiritual wisdom did he not scale! He had literally and truly no education, as it is generally considered at the present time. So he had no access to the Scriptures. Yet, as attested to by his brother disciples and people who visited him in later times, words of wisdom flowed from his lips. He had direct access to the Source of all knowledge. Such was the transmutation that was produced by the company of Sri Ramakrishna in Lātu Maharaj.

But personalities like Sri Ramakrishna come once in a while, once in an age. They are the embodiments of spirituality, they are the Incarnations, the path-finders. What and who they are exactly is beyond any man's mind to assess. They can be understood in a small

measure only through the disciples, who reveal some aspects of his life through their own. Are we then to wait till another Incarnation comes? No. Though Incarnations and saints of a high order may not always be present amidst us, there are at all times sincere and earnest people treading the path of spirituality or exclusively devoted to God, in smaller or greater number. Even in the worst spiritual crisis they are present, as can be inferred from the words of the Gita, which says that the Lord incarnates for the protection of the good and chastisement of the evil. It is the company of these virtuous, holy men that one should seek. Sri Ramakrishna declares, 'One cannot know the truth about God through science. Science gives us information only about things perceived by the senses: of things material. For this reason a man cannot comprehend spiritual things with his ordinary intelligence. To understand them he must live in the company of holy persons.' Then he gives a familiar example to illustrate this idea: 'You learn to feel the pulse by living with a physician.'

Sri Ramakrishna's one favourite phrase which explains the usefulness of holy company is, 'Come here now and then'. This he advised all those who had good parts in them. who were spiritually inclined, though they themselves did not know of it. He was a diviner of souls. At the very first sight he could find out the propensities and possibilities of a person. So, whenever he would come across a person who had a taste for spiritual life, he would repeat this invitation of his; and in some cases where he was sure that a little effort would do immense good to the persons, he kept constant watch over them and had them brought to him; and if they failed to come for any long time due to any reason he would himself seek them out.

IV

How does the company of holy persons help? How does it act? Holy persons have known the evanescence of worldly things and have also come to know that the only thing that is valuable, covetable, real and existing is God. Having known about it they are strenuously striving to realize it in their own lives by giving up all desires and by trying to keep constant remembrance of Him, in many ways. Sri Krishna voices their feelings thus: 'With their minds and senses given to Me, expounding about Me to one another, always speaking about Me, they spend their time in great joy.'² It is not a morbid elation like that of the enjoyment of sense pleasures — which as a reaction brings in great depression with the passing away of the moment — that one feels in thinking of God. It is not stimulated by drugs. It spontaneously wells up from the heart. Its source is perennial, nay eternal.

A glance at a day's routine of Sri Ramakrishna, as available to us in the written records, explains the veracity of the above statement of the Gita. It also explains the potential creativity of that bliss — a creativity far more beneficial to man than any he could think of giving effect to, viz, the unravelling of a new life, the opening of fresh vistas which were till then closed to his vision.

For Sri Ramakrishna there was neither day nor night. Every hour would bring on him a different divine mood. He had very little or no sleep at nights. With him the nights would pass away in *samādhi*. But whenever any devotees stayed with him he was careful to see that they did their spiritual practices regularly. He would wake them up even at three o'clock in the morning and ask them to sit for meditation. In the small hours of the morning he would start chanting the names of God, totally immersed in His thought and utterly unaware of the surroundings as well as of his own body. For hours this would go on. Later in the day, if any devotees stayed with him he would talk on God and give them helpful instructions.

In the afternoon he rested only for a short while after the midday meal. Devotees from Calcutta would then arrive. Sometimes there would be singing of devotional songs, but there would always be unceasing talks on God. Many times during the singing of songs and in the midst of talks he would go into ecstasy, either being moved by the sentiment of the songs, or at the mention of a particular approach to God. Thus in his company it was all a veritable mart of joy-supreme and awareness of God.

Sri Ramakrishna, the adept teacher that he was, discouraged all talks except on God among the devotees. Do not the Upanisads say, 'Know Him, the Atman, alone and give up all other vain speech. This is the way to Immortality, Blessedness, Liberation'? ³ Sri Ramakrishna lived the truths of the Upanisads and helped others live up to them. To the youngsters he would say, 'You are pure and unsullied; untainted by the touch of the world; so you must be careful. Keep away from all attractions of the world. When the plant is young, one should protect it with hedges and keep off the cattle from trampling over it or eating it up. But when it grows into a tree even an elephant can be tied to its trunk.' Who would speak such plain words except a holy man? The holy man is not at all bound by the conventions of society. He is no respecter of persons; where truths, higher values of life were concerned, he would be plain spoken. However, truth is sometimes bitter; but, like medicine though bitter should be administered to cure a patient of his disease, truth though unpalatable must be spoken to cure man of his worldly fever. And that only a holy man has the right and courage to do. We will do well to read, what Sri Ramakrishna said to Bankim Chandra Chatterjee,⁴ the great novelist of Bengal, regarding the duties of man. He never minced matters. That is the advantage of a holy man's company: he would correct you if you went wrong. He neither feared nor curried favour with any person.

A disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Ramakrishnananda, the first President of the monastery in Madras spoke to the boys who came to him, about renunciation as the only means to God realization. The parents of the boys, naturally, got frightened lest the boys should turn monks. Some of them, who were helping the upkeep of the monastery in some way, threatened the Swami that they would withdraw their support if he did not desist from preaching renunciation. The Swami seemed to have remarked, 'What! Shall I stop preaching what our Master has taught and shown us as the only goal of life? Let them that are averse to such advice withhold their help if they like. The Lord will look after my needs.' How undaunted are the holy men! For them truth is dearer than life itself; and they alone know how to be steadfast to truth.

On another occasion, a gentleman who came to visit the monastery at Madras pulled out a newspaper to read. This called forth a sharp rebuke from Swami Ramakrishnananda: 'Sir,' he said, 'you can read that elsewhere. When you have come to a holy place think of holy things.' Instances like these can be extensively cited to prove that we learn from holy persons much that can help us in our spiritual life, if we but care to cultivate their association. The *Bhāgavata* too remarks: 'That same association, which cultivated towards ephemeral objects out of improper understanding, becomes the cause of bondage, transmigration, when cherished towards holy persons makes for non-attachment'⁵ Continuing it says that these holy men are verily the breakers of bondage (*sangadosa harā hi te*). 'By constant association with them, the incidents about the glories of God become sweet like honey to the heart and ears of the audience; and with this liking will follow immediately faith, taste and devotion to the path of salvation. By devotion and thinking about the Lord's deeds man gets dispassion towards the sense pleasures. It is then that he, devoted to *yoga*, will try by the honest *yogamārga* to control the mind. Thus, such a man without serving the purpose of Nature (i.e.

without running after the sense pleasures), and by knowledge fortified with dispassion, by yoga directed towards the Lord, and by devotion to Him, besieges the Indwelling Spirit in this very life,'⁶ further adds the *Bhāgavata*.

V

To the question, how long one should have holy company, we may answer only in one way; that is as long as one lives. Even God-men and men of God desire the company of pure souls, what then to speak of ordinary aspirants! How fervently did Sri Ramakrishna pray to the Divine Mother! 'Oh Mother,' he said, 'where are Thy pure-souled devotees! Bring them here, Mother, bring them. My ears are burning by hearing the talks of the worldly people.' Such then is the desirability of holy company.

Only one class of people need no holy company viz. those who are too much engrossed in the world, whom the *Bhāgavata* poignantly describes as 'stricken by destiny'. With very much pathos the scripture says: 'These miserable people have their intelligence stricken by destiny in a way as to make their senses averse to discourses on the Divine — discourses which are potent to destroy all evils. They have their minds completely overpowered by greed and therefore craving for the niggardly little crumbs of desires, engage themselves in unwholesome acts from eternity to eternity.'⁷ For them the very atmosphere where the holy ones live becomes stifling, unbearable. How it is so, we shall illustrate from the incidents which Sri Ramakrishna observed and give it in his own words: 'Sometimes I find that the devotees of God are accompanied by worthless people. Their companions are immersed in gross worldliness and don't enjoy spiritual talk at all. Since the devotees keep on, for a long time, talking with me about God, the others become restless. Finding it impossible to sit there any longer, they whisper to their devotee friends: "When shall we be going? How long will you stay here?" The devotees say: "Wait a bit. We shall go after a little while." Then the worldly people say in a disgusted tone: "Well then, you can talk. We shall wait for you in the boat."'

However this may be, even people who desire worldly things have much to gain by serving these holy men say the Upanisads. 'Whatever worlds a man of purified *sattva* thinks of in his mind, whatsoever enjoyment he desires, all those worlds and all those desires he obtains. Therefore one who wants wealth or power should propitiate these knowers of the Ātman,'⁸ declares the *Mundaka Upanisad*. Sankaracharya commenting on the above sloka remarks that 'the worlds and enjoyments' that such a person thinks of may be for himself or for others and as a man of purified *sattva*, all his wishes will come to be fulfilled. Yet, it may be noted that as for himself a knower of Brahman will have no desire. For he has gone beyond desires and attained the Highest. Or to put it in the words of the Gita that state is one, 'Attaining which he does not think there is anything higher or superior to be obtained and established in which he is not perturbed by the direst of calamities.'

¹ Katha Up. 4 . 1.

² Gita. 10.9.

³ Mundaka Up. 2.2.5.

⁴ Cf. Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna. Pub.: Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras. 1947 Edn. Pp. 640-641.

⁵ Bhagavata III. 23.55.

⁶ Bhagavata III. 25. 25-27.

⁷ Bhagavata III.9.7.

⁸ Mundaka Up. 3.1.10.

Swami Paratparananda

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A CHILD comes into this world disbursing, as it were, joy unto all its near and dear ones. Yes, even, the mother who suffers extreme pain to bring it into being is pleased and forgets all her pains looking at it. But the child itself is born with a cry in its mouth. The child grows into an adolescent and becomes a man, performs deeds well or ill and grows old and lastly bids farewell to this world willy nilly, immersing his kith and kin in sorrow. That is the existence of man. But how does man take his exit? We shall try to recapture that here. Most people do so unwillingly, struggling to escape but unable to get out of the clutches of death. With their minds hovering about the hoard of wealth they have acquired, about the dear children that surround them and last, but not least, about their own bodies, which though corruptible were so well taken care of, though worn out so much more liked. It is a wrench, at the heart to leave the body, unbearable at the same time unavoidable. That is the way most of the people take leave of the world — with moans and groans. The pangs of death are terrible.

Let us not believe, for a moment, if anyone says that all of them who bid adieu in this manner are agnostics, atheists or sceptics even the so-called believers too fare no better. For they had not practised what they uttered their lips spoke but their hearts responded not. They had no faith in their own beliefs, no trust in the God they professed. So they too quit the world in a like manner. Death is an inevitable process ¹ of this creation. That is the one thing that is certain in this universe; forests are turned into cities and cities turn into desert dunes; where mountains are, there may form lakes in time. So uncertainty there is about everything, but death is very certain for every being that is born.² All else is momentary. You had your forefathers and they again their own but where are they all now! Gone, gone are they into the womb of death.

Let not the sophisticated think that a pessimistic view of life is being presented here. There is no idea in this to weaken man. This is the most realistic view of all the realisms. Why should we be unrealists and blind our eyes to this indubitable fact? For does not death consume everything? It does. Let this be not forgotten. The role of death is therefore to make man aware of his destiny: that however high he may be placed, whatever aid of technology or medicine he may have, his end is either in a coffin or in a handful of ashes. Shall we then mourn our life in sack cloth and ashes? No, that is not the purpose of life, nor of death. This process of birth and death is going to be repeated until we know God, see God, realize Him in this very life. A pointed reference is found to this idea in one of the Upanisads which comments: ‘If you *know* It here you have the truth, you have all. If not it is a great loss — a denouement. Knowing It (Brahman) present in every being the wise ones leaving this mortal coil attain Immortality.’³

The passage quoted above implies four things clearly: (1) that there is a life after death, (2) that there is a way of living by which man's life can be fruitful here and a blessing hereafter, (3) that all life lived otherwise than in this manner is a colossal waste, and (4) that

the way to Immortality lies in seeing divinity manifest in every being.

II

If death stalks the world and we brood over it, how can we take courage to live a life, glorious or not? This question also has been answered in the above passage. Let us see how. We come across here two words *mṛtyu* (death) and *amṛta* (immortal). After death one becomes immortal. Is it not a contradiction? Apparently it is. But what is it that dies? Can we say it is the body? No. The body is there though the spirit had sped away. What kept the body moving? The spirit. So death is a separation of this material body from something which we as ordinary men are usually ignorant of, but which those who have felt and experienced It call, Spirit, the Ātman, Jiva or Self. And this Ātman they say becomes immortal. What is the meaning of that? Was it mortal then? No, but in common parlance we can no more describe it than in this way. For man sees the body and thinks that he is that much mass of flesh and bones. Very few can transcend that idea. It is impossible for many even to think that there can be any existence beyond the body. The very idea puts them in a terrible fright. To such it is said that this Atman becomes immortal. So, knowing that all does not end with the here, man must take courage to work for the hereafter, immortality.

In olden days this phenomenon of death must have set man thinking as to ‘what happens after it’, as we notice in the story of Naciketas in the *Kathopanishad*. It is even today a riddle to a great part of humanity. Man dare not peep beyond the world of the senses. For it is dark to him there. He has neither the equipment nor the instruments to probe into its depth. He cannot know anything.

What is beyond is a mystery that death holds in its own possession. Those who are able to force this secret from it will go laughing; they will accept physical dissolution with as much equanimity as they accepted life. Because they have unmasked death. It is the mask that is frightening man. Children are afraid when someone frightens them putting on uncanny masks like that of giants. But a few clever among them will find out that it is the mother that has come to frighten them and being sure of it go and jump into her lap smiling. Likewise, when once man knows the true nature of death and seen the face of Reality unmasked he does not fear any more. For he finds that the real in himself and the Reality behind the universe are identical or he sees it is the beloved Mother that exists beyond his ken of the senses. He then understands that leaving the world he would not lose anything but gain the eternal company of the Divine Mother or the Lord. Hence how can death have any fear for him? There are instances when people have bidden farewell to this world at the vision of their Chosen Deity, saying ‘Coming, Mother, coming’, probably, in response to the beckoning of the Mother. It should not, however, be mistaken as the delirium of a fevered brain, for they were seen to be in full possession of their faculties as they were passing away. After uttering these words, with a smile on their lips they depart and that without any effort, without any regret. Sri Krishna says in the *Gita*, ‘One who at the end of one's life goes away leaving one's body remembering Me alone that one undoubtedly attains My true nature.’⁴

There is not a single passage anywhere in the Hindu scriptures which speaks or indicates of death as something to be dreaded. Here, in the sloka of the *Gita* quoted above, for instance we have the words, *kalevaram muktvā*, casting off the body and *prayāti*, goes. These expressions point out that there is no extinction of the individual (the Ātman) with his separation from the body. That is the idea that is taught — of travel — a beautiful idea, preg-

nant with meaning. Who does not know about travelling in these days? Every one travels according to his means and according to his likings. One goes to a holy place, another for sight-seeing, a third one on business, a fourth one is dragged by the bond of slavery from one end of the world to the other and so on. Similarly man according to his desires, according to his likings and inclinations and with the store of merit or demerit at his back travels i.e. transmigrates from one body to another, from one place of enjoyment to another or straightaway back to the Lord, from whom he came, to live in communion with Him. When death is viewed in this light, has man fear of it? It is no doubt good and grand to scorn life and face death laughing in a good cause, to become a martyr. But it is grander and better still to pass away knowing the Reality — a state which knocks off the wheel of birth and death for ever for that person.

How does the realization of God or Reality rescue man from the fear of death? As already stated this phenomenon of death unites the devotee with his Chosen Ideal, the beloved Lord, ‘for fear of whom the fire burns and the sun shines and gives heat; for fear of whom again, Indra, Vayu and even Death, the fifth one, run their errands dutifully’.⁵ When it is the Lord who directs Death why would the devotee be afraid of it? For when death comes it will be by the will of God. Viewed from the Advaitic standpoint also it is almost the same, for ‘after realizing the oneness of everything where can there be infatuation or sorrow’.⁶ In this state there is no more going or coming. Sri Ramakrishna discussed this point in a very penetrative manner. He puts the questions: What are man's duties? What will accompany him after death, in the hereafter? He himself then answers thus:

“True. When a man dies after attaining Knowledge, he doesn't have to go to another plane of existence; he isn't born again. But as long as he has not attained Knowledge, as long as he has not realized God, he must come back to the life of this earth; he can never escape it. For such a person there is a hereafter. A man is liberated after attaining Knowledge, after realizing God. For him there is no further coming back to earth. If a boiled paddy-grain is sown, it doesn't sprout. Just so, if a man is boiled by the fire of Knowledge, he cannot lead a worldly life, for he has no attachment to ‘woman and gold’. What will you gain by sowing boiled paddy? He who has realized God has obtained the fruit of Immortality — not a common fruit like a gourd or a pumpkin. He is free from rebirth. He is not born anywhere — on earth, in the solar world, or in the lunar world.”⁷

This statement of Sri Ramakrishna is amply supported by Sruti and Smṛti. Yājñavalkya was asked by Ārthabhāga: ‘When this liberated man dies, do his organs go up from him or do they not?’ Yājñavalkya replied, ‘No they merge in him only. The body swells, is inflated and in that state lies dead.’⁸

In the prior discussion Yājñavalkya by implication had established that death is swallowed by another death — the death of realization; and he gave the example of fire and water. As fire consumes everything and even this fire becomes the food of water, so death itself becomes the food of self-realization. The *Gita* too says: ‘Here itself is the transmigration overcome by those whose mind is established in equality; for Brahman is even and blemishless; hence they are established in Brahman,’⁹

III

When we say that the Hindu scriptures do not describe death as something to be dreaded, can we suppose that they encourage death by suicide? There is no basis for such a

supposition. Suicide is committed mostly by frustrated persons, cowards who dare not face calamities or people who lose their mental balance at least for the moment. But there may have been a few cases where some realized souls ended their physical existence forcibly; but such instances are very rare and they cannot be termed as suicide. Sri Ramakrishna is of this view.

It is here necessary to point out that merely imagining that one has realized God, or because one had some dreams or passing visions regarding God one is not entitled to end his life on this earth. The marks of God-realization are too clear to go unnoticed. To realize God one must be free of desires as in the analogy of the ship of Sri Ramakrishna — ‘all the bolts and screws of a ship that is passing a magnetic mine are loosened and the ship founders’. Similarly, when once a person realizes the Highest his desires are completely destroyed; worldly or heavenly enjoyments do not attract him: all his doubts and vacillations come to an end; the fruits of all his actions good or bad are annihilated.¹⁰ Here is a test of man's disinterestedness. Generally people crave for the fruits of their actions which are good. If a man can sincerely give up his desire to enjoy the fruits of his meritorious acts — even the desire to gain name and fame — then he has reached perfection, in other words, only a man who has realized God, who is feeling God in every breath that he takes, can alone be so detached. Such a person may cast the body away if he finds the pull of God too intense to be suffered in it, or retain it as long as his *prārabdha karma* lasts.

IV

Death is an accoutrement in the armoury of Nature to forewarn man not to entangle himself too much in the affairs of the world. If we consider its role in the most materialistic way, death is a great reliever of distress and disease. Ailments assail man no matter what his age is, according to the merits of his actions done in the past or present life; with age the power of resistance drops and diseases assume frightening magnitude. Yet, the man given to an outward life finds not his desires lessening. Sri Sankara in a graphic description in his poem *Mohamudgara* brings this out: ‘With furrowed skin, freckled face, toothless mouth, the old man totters on his stick, yet the bootless mass of desires has left him not.’¹¹ Such is the fate of the man who ensnares himself in the world that he has built around himself. Sri Ramakrishna cites the example of the silk worm which builds a cocoon round itself and suffers to die in it. Should it however care to, it can break and come out of it to fly free in its beautiful plumage. But such is its infatuation for the house that it has built that it prefers to remain and consequently die there! Man is none better. He is satisfied in indulging with petty jealousies, with his guilted acquirements, and with his wife and children, whom he considers his most near and dear ones. But what happens when he dies. Sankara pathetically depicts it thus: ‘As long as the breath resides in the body so long do they enquire about the man's welfare, but when that last breath has left the body, the very wife is afraid of that frame.’¹²

However, such is *maya* that man is befooled to believe that all is well with him. Sri Ramakrishna remarks that even the Lord entangled in *maya* does not like to get out of it. He gives the instance of the mythical Incarnation of Lord Vishnu as the sow. For a long time after the purport, for which He assumed that body, was accomplished the Lord did not return to His abode. The gods were perturbed, messengers were sent but the Lord did not heed them. At last the devas with Siva in their forefront went to Him and found Him suckling the young ones. When He was told that He should return to His abode, He replied that He was happy there and didn't want to leave the young ones. At this, the story goes on that, Siva

drove his trident and demolished the sow body of the Lord and the Lord too with a great laugh returned to His abode. The story may be mythical but it has a great lesson. Man's condition is almost identical. Man too, forgetting his own nature, wallows here in this world, weeps and wails and sometimes smiles to weep again. But when he knows what his true nature is, he renounces all transient things and seeks the Eternal. And till he achieves the Eternal, till he ceases to see, as it were, many things here, he will have to face death again and again, says the *Kathopanishad*.¹³ In this respect too the role of death is very conspicuous. If one death itself is unbearable should not man try to overcome these rounds of births and deaths?

What is the way? For the ordinary individual the path of righteousness, *dharma* has been enjoined by the scriptures. When it has been rightly practised man becomes fit to proceed higher. Without a moral base, there can be no spiritual edifice, small or great. 'One who has not rested from wickedness, one who has not gained equanimity, one who has not controlled his senses, and one who has a fickle mind cannot aspire to attain this knowledge (of the Ātman).' ¹⁴ That is the verdict of the sages of all times and climes and one who wants to go across this ocean of birth and death has to practise equanimity, morality, chastity and control of the senses. There is no other way. 'Neither by karma nor by progeny or wealth but by renunciation (of all the desires) alone some attained immortality, (went beyond the bounds of death),' ¹⁵ declares the Upanisad categorically.

¹ Gita, II.27.

² Ibid.

³ Kena Up. II.5.

⁴ Gita 8.5.

⁵ Katha Up. 6.3.

⁶ Isa Up. 7.

⁷ The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, 1947, p.640. Published by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras-4.

⁸ Br.Up. 3.2.11. Translation by Swami Madhavananda.

⁹ Bhagavad Gita 5.19.

¹⁰ Munda Up. 2.2.8.

¹¹ Mohamudgara – 15.

¹² Ibid., 6.

¹³ Katha Up. 4.10.

¹⁴ Ibid., 2.24.

¹⁵ Kaivalyopanishad. 1.3.

By Swami Paratparananda

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VARIOUS ARE the human propensities and diverse are man's aspirations; still; mankind can be broadly divided into two sections: as those possessed of good tendencies and those with evil propensities, or if we are to speak in the language of the Gita: those having *daivi* (godly) and *asurā* (devilish) tendencies. The godly tendencies lead to liberation and the devilish ones make for bondage says the Gita¹. This, however, does not mean that you can meet everywhere people exclusively good or exclusively bad. Man is a conglomeration of both dispositions and when in some the good proclivities are prevalent they are said to be good, or righteous; on the other hand, when in others the evil inclinations are predominantly manifesting they are said to be wicked or unrighteous. But there are a few who are wholly and completely filled with godly qualities. Such persons gain liberation when even present in the body. No wicked action is possible for them, nay when they attain that state not even an evil thought crosses their minds. Such a man's one ambition in life is to endear himself to God. To such a person 'that is the highest duty, supreme righteousness by which he attains motiveless, unimpaired devotion to the Lord; attaining which his inner Being pervades with an ethereal bliss'.²

But very rare are such people. This is not an over-statement. It is almost a truism. For though many do profess religion and conform to the dogmas and creeds and rituals enjoined in it, few can be said to be exclusively wanting God. They may want Him and at the same time want something else also. Rather they may be said to be wanting God for getting those other things. Sri Ramakrishna has repeatedly expressed his regret about this attitude of the people. 'Alas!' he remarks, 'who wants God? People want everything else but God!' Why is it? Is God so elusive? Sri Ramakrishna affirms that it is the other way about. He states, 'God is so eager to meet the devotee. If you take one step towards Him, He comes ten steps towards you.' In spite of it occasionally only some one is seen to want Him and Him alone. Now, how can we take this one step is the question.

Usually one's heart is filled with endearments to father, mother, wife, husband, children, friends and the like. Every endeavour is made to please them, but it is always not a successful attempt. Nevertheless people indulge in it. Why? Because of attachment. This attachment sometimes becomes morbid. The son illtreats the mother but she clings to him all the same because of this attachment, which she mistakenly thinks as love, says Swami Vivekananda. Sri Ramakrishna calls this attachment or compassion to relations as *māya*, whereas compassion to all beings he terms as *dayā*. And this compassion to all beings forms one of the disciplines by which we endear ourselves to God. How do we know that? The theists would certainly believe that this universe is the creation of God and it does not take much effort to conclude that God would definitely be pleased if his creatures are served. For does not Sri Krishna say, 'One who worships Me dwelling in every being, in a spirit of

Unity, is a Yogi. Whatever his mode of life, he lives in Me'?³ Still, it is not compassion in the ordinary sense of the term but worship, that is demanded of us, to all creatures. Jesus also said, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.'

Again the Advaitists cannot but be worshipping all as they see, at least intellectually, that 'there are not many here.'⁴ 'Everything movable and immovable is to be covered by the Lord' says the *Isāvāśya Upanisad*.⁵ About the Supreme Being or the worlds beyond the senses we can know only through the scriptures and persons who have transcended the senses and have had actual experience of Reality. The scriptures declare, as we have seen, that we have to see everything as God. So, as we take for granted many of the scientific theories, although we do not know them by our own experience, in a similar manner about the science of the soul, (Atman) or Brahman too we have to learn to trust in God-men and the scriptures, which are nothing but the record of the experiences of sages in this direction.

However, to get a perfect mastery over this discipline it is to be aided and strengthened by other virtues. For this, seeing God in everything, is not a matter that can easily be accomplished. A great deal of foundational work is necessary for the purpose. Purity of heart is an immense help to it. Jesus said, 'Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.' All the efforts of yoga, of all actions, of all pilgrimage and the like are to attain this purity of heart.

What is purity? How is it to be attained? We have knowledge of clear water. We see stainless white garments. We also know the care with which a scientist selects his substances for his experiment — they should all be pure otherwise the experiment will not be a success; results will be not be accurate; on the other hand, if the ingredients are impure the results will be misleading. Likewise our hearts should be unstained — unstained by desires, jealousy, hatred, pride, anger and the like. When such purity is attained, the heart, like a mirror devoid of all dross, reflects God.

This purity can be attained by being guileless. Guile is the greatest enemy of spiritual life. What happens is this: A man of guile hides his inner feelings and desires under the cloak of opposite ones. Simultaneously his inner Being also gets enshrouded by those very cloaks, until the encrustments become too thick for penetration, and a clear vision of his own inner being is made impossible. Clothed in these several disguises the conscience looks hideous to the very man; and he is afraid to dive into himself. That is where guile leads him — to the bottomless abyss of fear, fear even from his own conscience. That is why the sages ask us to be truthful in mind, word and deed. Sri Ramakrishna loved people of guileless nature very dearly. The very sight of them sometimes would put him into ecstasy. He would say, 'One cannot be guileless without a great deal of spiritual discipline in previous births. A hypocritical and calculating mind can never attain God.'

The above is a significant saying when, in these days, every act is weighed and judged from the material benefit it can bestow; utility as they would call it; pragmatic value of the act as the philosophers would term it. There should be no calculation as far as the spiritual life is concerned; love towards God should be motiveless (*ahaituki*), that is what is implied in the above statement. Swami Vivekananda says, 'Love knows no bargaining. Wherever there is any seeking for something in return there can be no real love; it becomes a mere matter of shop-keeping.' On another occasion he remarked, 'Perfect love is very rare in human relations, for human love is almost always interdependent and mutual. But God's love is a constant stream, nothing can hurt or disturb it.'

We see that a love that bargains is no love at all, and unless man is desireless he cannot love in this wise. It is said that God is a jealous lover. He won't brook any share in

love. Sri Ramakrishna said: 'If there is any one in charge of the store-room the master of the house will not go there. He would say "What would I do there? There is already some one."' Similarly if our heart is full of desires, full of egoism, God has no place to enter there.

The common impediments in the life of the spiritual aspirant are lust and greed. They overpower man, specially the former has a great drag on him and with lust comes also greed. It is inevitable. That is why so much stress is laid on *brahmacharya* for a person who desires to endear himself to God. When the base desire of lust is controlled and turned Godward, a sixth sense, as it were, grows in man and he views the world in quite a different light. He sees that it is God alone who has become everything. But this cannot be done in a day. Those who want quick results will therefore be disappointed if after a year or two they think they have not made any progress. But depression which leads to abandoning of the path is bad, whereas if it makes him resolve more firmly to reach the goal, whatever the consequences, is commendable.

There are, what is stated in Christian theology, 'the dark nights of the soul'. The aspirant undergoes a tremendous anguish at the loss of vision of his Ideal, a glimpse of which he had had for a time. It may be from the layman's point of view, a trying time. But the person himself is unaware of it. His eyes, so to say, see nothing. He feels nothing except a great hankering for God. When such a yearning possesses man, God comes to him. Sri Ramakrishna gave the example of a teacher who taught his disciple how he could come face to face with God. The teacher took the disciple to a river and as the disciple dived into the water, the teacher held him down and did not let him off until he began to struggle wildly. On the disciple's recovering his breath the teacher asked, 'What did you desire most at that time?' The disciple replied, 'A whiff of breath and nothing else.' The teacher said, 'When you desire God in that way He will come.' Then will that person be dear to God.

Besides lust and greed, pride also happens to be a bad stumbling block for the man on the path of God. Pride of wealth, beauty, power, scholarship, physical strength and so on. Each of them is an insurmountable barrier for the common man. But before a man who loves God they fall away like houses of cards. 'Thou alone art my father and mother, Thou my relation and friend, Thou my knowledge and wealth, in short, O! Lord of gods, Thou art my everything,' sings a poet. But how to get rid of this pride? By discrimination. Reason out: What is beauty? How long does it last? A few years and everything fades away. Power is unstable like the drop of water on a red hot pan. Why are we so enamoured of our physical strength? A day's fever and man lies prostrated. Scholarship: What will it give man? At best some wealth, some name and some fame. But what use is all this when the life eternal is taken into account?

Sri Krishna in the twelfth chapter of the Gita, deals at length with the type of person who endears himself to God. He says: 'Devoid of hatred to all creatures; friendly and compassionate to every being; free from egoism, and possessiveness; equanimous in pleasure and pain; always contented; of controlled senses and of right resolution; and whose mind and intellect are surrendered to Me, such a devotee is dear to Me.

'Such a person who causes not anxiety to the world nor in whom the world is ever able to cause anxiety; who is free from feelings such as happiness and anger, fear and anxiety, he is dear to Me.

'Non coveting, pure, dexterous in action, indifferent to worldly gains and losses, free from sorrow and one who never of his own accord moves to manifest his will, such a one is dear to Me.

'One who is neither elated (by gaining desirable objects) nor dejected (by adverse

circumstances), neither grieves nor desires, and one who discards both good and evil, that devotee is dear to Me.

‘Equal to friend and foe, equanimous in praise and blame, bearing heat and cold alike, without company, homeless, steadfast in devotion, satisfied by what chance may bring such a one is dear to Me.’¹

Sri Krishna also categorically states that these three—desire, anger and greed—are the open and wide gates to hell and hence of one's own destruction, we may say, of spiritual destruction. ‘This desire and this anger is born out of rajo-guna. They are of inordinate appetite and most sinful; know them to be enemies here,’² declares he at another place. How these sense objects drag man down is beautifully given in the second chapter of the Gita. ‘A person who always thinks of sense pleasures gets attached to them. By this contact desires arise. And when these desires are not fulfilled anger is generated. And when anger overcomes man, he gets infatuated ; (he loses all sense of decorum or decency). Due to infatuation all memory and reasoning fail him. When memory fails his intellect succumbs. And with it his spiritual death is complete’³ says Sri Krishna.

How short-living these physical enjoyments, pleasures, are has been brought out in a beautiful verse by Robert Burns thus:

But pleasures are like poppies spread,
You seize the flow'r its bloom is shed;
Or like the snow falls in the river,
A moment white — then melts for ever.

Such is the end of all earthly goods and vanities begotten therefrom. ‘Who then, having seen the unageing gods, and knowing these pleasures and goods of heaven and earth subject to destruction will indulge in them for any length of time?’ asks Naciketa of Yama. Therefore for one desirous of knowing and seeing God, there is no other way than to discard all of these things and take shelter in Him alone.

¹ Gita, 16.5.

² Bhagavata, I.2.6.

³ Gita, 6.31.

⁴ Br. Up. 4.4.19.

⁵ Isa Up., 1.

⁶ Bhagavad Gita, XII, 13 to 19.

⁷ Ibid., 3.37.

⁸ Ibid., 2.62 & 63.

By Swami Paratparananda

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SPIRITUAL LIFE has a sort of mystery surrounding it. Man does not know by what act of his the inner awakening will come, by what means the doors of his vision will open, what shall illuminate his path. For it has come in several ways to different persons. Gautama's renunciation was due to the sight of misery, disease and death; and in striving to find a way out of these tribulations and sufferings he became the Buddha. In the life of Tulsidas it was the admonition of his wife that brought out the transformation. Young Tulsidas loved his wife extremely. He could not part from her even for a day. One day, however, he had to go on some work, far away from home. On returning at night he found that she had been taken to her father's. Tulsidas set out immediately and reached there late in the night. The wife was vexed; and ashamed of being railed at by people mildly reproached him, 'Ah! what attachment you have for these bones and flesh. If only you had half this love for God you would have realized Him.' That was enough. A flood of light, as it were, fell upon him. That very moment he left his home and hearth. Sri Chaitanya's pilgrimage to Vrindavan brought him in contact with Īswar Puri and that set the chain of events ending in his complete renunciation of the world and the propagation of the Bhakti cult throughout India. It is said that Swami Saradananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, used to follow meticulously the religious rituals whenever he visited temples. He would even circumambulate and ring the bells that hung in the Siva temple at Banaras, as was the custom. When asked by some one why he too followed these superstitions, he seems to have replied: 'Who knows, my boy, by what action the Lord is pleased? So I follow all the customs, every one of them and I don't know, friend, how to express my love for the Lord,' Such then is the idea: anything may help to rouse our sleeping divinity.

Now, in the scriptures pilgrimage has been recognized as one of the means of devotion. Therefore with a minimum of belief in the scriptures and words of the saints, man must set out on the spiritual path. For it is not possible to scientifically and concretely demonstrate the progress or retrogression of a human being after he has done this or that deed, or had performed one or the other pilgrimage. It is possible that the man himself may not feel the change even after a

long time. But on that account he should not slacken his efforts or give way to despair.

ATTITUDE TO PILGRIMAGE

Facility of travel and eating houses at every street corner, even in places inaccessible before, has made pilgrimage a sight-seeing affair with many. Many more are attracted by the sculpture and the art that has gone into the building of the temples. But little do they care to think of the Deity that dwells in the temple. Sri Ramakrishna used to say 'People are enamoured of the garden, but rarely do they seek to know the owner.' Every word of his is being verified as true today.

What a contrast this is to the ancient mode of pilgrimage, even that of a hundred and fifty or two hundred years ago! At that time only earnest persons ventured to set out on a pilgrimage. For they had to travel mostly on foot and their path lay through forests full of wild beasts. So, when they thought of undertaking a pilgrimage they made over the responsibilities of the worldly affairs to those at home, bade them adieu and made themselves over to the care of God, their Lord. They dared not carry money for fear of dacoits; naturally they had to depend upon the hospitality accorded to them by the people on the way. The thought about home never troubled them. Their minds dwelt on the sanctity of the place they were to visit. The Deity, the grace that the Deity had showered on the saints, the lives of the saints who had lived and made the place holier — all these and similar associations would be revolving in their minds. We cannot expect people at the present time to go on foot, perhaps that would be thought of as absurd either to suggest or to follow. But surely the other part for which a pilgrimage is really undertaken, i.e., the constant remembrance of the Lord, is neither impossible to try nor absurd to suggest.

We come now to a very subtle point in the conduct of a pilgrim i.e., how should he behave in a place of worship. This is most important. A man may be a millionaire, he may have a big pedigree, and may be a great scholar. But what is that before the Creator of the Universe — all of his wealth, scholarship and nobility is as nothing in the presence of One who is the Lord of everything that was, is and will be. Yet, how cramped man's thinking is! Even earnest devotees falter here. Once at the Dakshineswar temple some ornaments of the Radha-Govinda image were stolen. At this Mathuranath Biswas, the then proprietor, a son-in-law of Rani Rasmani and an ardent devotee of Sri Ramakrishna, said in his hearing, addressing the image, 'What a shame, O God! You could not save your own ornaments!' Sri Ramakrishna sharply rebuked Mathuranath: 'Does He who has Lakshmi, the goddess of fortune, for His hand-maid and attendant ever lack any splendour? These jewels may be precious to you but to God they are no better than lumps of clay. Shame on you! You

shouldn't have spoken so meanly. What riches can you give to God to magnify His glory?' Yet, that is how man forgets himself in the pride of his wealth. It is difficult to be humble unless we feel the presence of a Being far far above us in every respect. This feeling is to be cultivated. With it will come the sense of our smallness, of our littleness. Spiritual life becomes a total failure if arrogance rules supreme in the mind. The idea of going on pilgrimage is not to show off but to practise the presence of God. We cannot purchase God's grace by our wealth. It is not by what one says about God but what one does and how one does it that God measures our earnestness and sincerity.

Pilgrimage, therefore, undertaken with a spirit of faith and earnestness and humility should also be accompanied by self-control, restraint of senses. Almost a parallel can be cited from the *Bhagavad Gita* when it speaks of the means to Knowledge, knowledge of God, Realization. It says: 'A man endowed with *shraddhā* obtains Knowledge.' Two words, however, were again immediately subjoined to this statement to qualify the aspirant: (*tatparah*) one who is intent and attached to it and (*samyatendriyah*) of controlled senses. Sankara commenting on this verse says that it is possible to fake humility in outer acts as bowing down and the like, but not so in *shraddhā* (faith). The control of the senses is an added requisite to be possessed by one who aims to scale the peaks of spirituality. In every path this control of the senses and the mind is spoken of as unmistakably necessary equipment. With a mind frittered and senses like unbroken horses the goal would remain as far as it ever was, nay may recede further. Sri Ramakrishna compares a man who has not gathered his mind from the sense pleasures and yet tries to realize God to a drunkard who rows a boat all night without lifting the anchor. He remains where he was though he thinks that he is fast progressing. Attachment to the world is the anchor. Unless man frees himself from that, at least for the duration of his pilgrimage or of practising any other discipline, all his struggle will yield but little fruit.

There is an exquisite instance which remarkably points out how faith works. When some of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna were proceeding to the shrine of Kedarnath in the Himalayas they saw a blind, old lady too trudging on. They were quite non-plussed as to why this lady who had lost her eyes should undertake such a hazardous journey. One of them asked, 'Mother, can you see'. 'No, my child', said she. 'Then why have you taken the trouble of this journey', asked he again. She replied, 'My child, what if I cannot see, but the Lord will surely see me.' That was the faith of the lady and she was quite satisfied that it would be enough for her salvation if she presented herself before the Deity and the Lord saw her. They were moved by the devotion of that lady.

WHAT ARE THE PLACES OF PILGRIMAGE

To Swami Vivekananda 'if there was any land on this earth that can lay claim to be the blessed *punya bhumi*, to be the land to which all souls on this earth must come to account for *karma*, the land to which every soul wending its way Godward must come to attain its last home, the land where humanity has attained its highest towards gentleness, towards generosity, towards purity, towards calmness, above all the land of introspection and spirituality — it was India'. He uttered these words with authority and sincerity. Why did he say so? Was it simply eulogy? It was not mere eulogy but there is a sound reason behind this remark of Swamiji. A holy place, for instance, is one which has been the place of birth, of *sādhana*, of the attainment of spiritual perfection, or ministration of a saint or saints. India has been such a place. Hundreds of saints have been born and have trodden this soil. It was here again that the highest philosophy had its birth and this was Swamiji's reason for considering India as a whole as a holy land. It was his inmost feeling too.

It is said of Swami Ramakrishnananda, a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna and the first President of the Ramakrishna Math at Madras, that he looked upon every place where Swami Vivekananda was reported to have stayed during his sojourn in South India as holy and used to bow down to it with great devotion. Narada in his *Bhakti Sutras* says, 'These holy ones impart sanctity to places of pilgrimage.'² The *Bhagavata* declares, 'It is not the waters nor the clay or stone idols, that have been there for a long time, that make a place holy but the saints who purify them by mere sight (by virtue of God residing in their hearts).'³ India has produced many saints and sages and that is why there are numerous places of pilgrimage throughout the country. Similarly other religions too have their own places of pilgrimage.

HOW DO THE HOLY PLACES PURIFY MAN?

As we said earlier, a person going on pilgrimage has to know about the history of the place he is going to visit. With that comes to his mind the lives of the saints who sanctified it, of the pure devotion of those saints and through them of God Himself by the law of association of ideas. Deep and constant thinking on holy men makes man pure. Patanjali in his Yoga Sutras states that meditation on a pure heart that has given up all attachment leads to calmness of the mind.⁴ It is a matter of common experience that mesmerists and psychologists by suggestion influence persons, may be for a short time but that they are able to do so cannot be denied. Their powers, however, are limited and are used for mundane purposes. The psychologists work by digging into the past of the patient by various means and find a remedial suggestion. Sages, on the other hand, when they are in body create an atmosphere round them surcharged with spirituality and this continues to exist, in the place they have lived, for a long time. It acts like a loadstone in attracting people,

even slightly inclined to a good life, to God.

Sri Ramakrishna's own words on this matter are the strongest testimony. He says, 'One undoubtedly finds inspiration in a holy place. I accompanied Mathur Babu to Vrindavan. Hriday and the ladies of Mathur's family were in our party. No sooner did I see the Kaliyadaman Ghat than a divine emotion surged up within me. I was completely overwhelmed. Hriday used to bathe me there as if I were a small child.'

'In the dusk I would walk on the bank of the Jamuna when the cattle returned along the sandy banks from their pastures. At the very sight of those cows the thought of Krishna would flash in my mind. I would run along like a mad man, crying: "Oh, where is Krishna? Where is my Krishna?"

'I went to Syāmakunda and Rādhākunda in a palanquin and got out to visit the holy Mount Govardhan. At the very sight of the mount I was overpowered with divine emotion and ran to the top. I lost all consciousness of the world around me. The residents of the place helped me to come down. On my way to the sacred pools of Syāmakunda and Rādhākunda, when I saw the meadows, the trees, the shrubs, the birds, and the deer, I was overcome with ecstasy. My clothes became wet with tears. I said: "O Krishna! Everything here is as it was in the olden days. You alone are absent.'" No doubt that Sri Ramakrishna was fully penetrated with God, soaked in God, and every *sādhaka* may not expect to reach such heights of inspiration, yet according to their progress each one will reap some benefit, each one will get a push, a lift higher.

Sri Ramakrishna also used to encourage his disciples to do their practices at the various places of his own *sādhana*. The conversation that took place between him and 'M', the writer of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, regarding Panchavati — the place at Dakshineswar temple garden where Sri Ramakrishna performed intense spiritual practices — unequivocally brings to our notice, the value of staying in a holy place. One day he said to 'M', who was staying overnight at Dakshineswar: 'Where will you sleep? In the hut in the Panchavati?' 'M': 'Won't they let me have the room on the upper floor of the *nahabat*?' 'M' selected the *nahabat* because he had a poetic temperament. From there he could see the sky, the Ganges, the moon-light, and the flowers in the garden.

Master: 'Oh, they'll let you have it. But I suggested the Panchavati because so much contemplation and meditation have been practised there and the name of God had been chanted there so often.' Does this not suggest that the Master recommended the atmosphere of the place to help the devotee in his *sādhana*, in his attempt to proceed Godward?

IS PILGRIMAGE NECESSARY FOR ALL?

Now, the question arises: Is pilgrimage necessary for all? Two

types of people do not require it. The saint who has realized God and the man who has not risen above the level of animal enjoyments. The latter will not gain any benefit from visiting such places. The attitude and aptitude being absent none of the other ideas help men to become pure, or to realize God even if they live in the sacred places. They are like fish and other aquatic animals that live in the sacred Ganga, or like the trees that grow in the precincts of temples, untouched by their sanctity.⁵ 'As the strength without work to do or work to do without strength are unable to accomplish the deed separately but when combined make the deed a certainty, likewise when endowed with bodily and mental purity and helped by the sanctity of the holy place one attains his goal easily,'⁶ says the *Mahābhārata*.

For the saint, again, there is no necessity of any pilgrimage, for he, having attained his goal, has nothing more to achieve. 'If he visits a place of pilgrimage it is only for the purpose of new inspiration,' says Sri Ramakrishna. For people who are in between these two stages of evolvment it is essential to visit places of pilgrimage, with all faith and devotion at their command, as a sort of spiritual discipline. All through the march of time we see even saints and sages having travelled from one end of India to the other enduring all hardships and tribulations; and thus have they sanctified and sometimes discovered anew the exact places of birth and sport of Divine Incarnations. It is said that it was Sri Chaitanya who found out the exact place of sport of Sri Krishna in Vrindavana. They are like spiritual diviners. They feel the spiritual atmosphere in an intense way and are able to leave to posterity a rich heritage, the heritage of a holy place from where successive generations could benefit spiritually. Therefore, pilgrimage should not be thought of as mere waste of time and energy or as an idle *wander-lust*. Further, it is possible to meet in these places some *sādhakas* or perfected souls whose company will help us on our onward march and transform us altogether. Most important thing, however, is to keep the spirit of sacredness burning and to acquire love of God. Then everything will become easy, everything will be helpful.

HOW TO CONDUCT ONESELF AFTER A PILGRIMAGE?

As it is necessary to prepare oneself to visit a holy place, as said already, so also it is necessary to ruminate over the pure thoughts and emotions that are generated in one's mind on the occasion of one's visit to a holy place. Sri Ramakrishna's advice to his disciples on this subject are of deep significance and will be of immense benefit when followed. We shall state it here with the circumstances that gave rise to the remarks.

'On one occasion,' writes Swami Saradananda in *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master*, 'some of us (devotees) accompanied

the Master to Kalighat, to pay our obeisance to the Divine Mother. The special divine manifestation of the Pithasthāna (hallowed place) and Her living manifestation in the mind and body of the Master produced an extraordinary joy in the hearts of the devotees. On our way back, one of us had to go to his father-in-law's place in response to a special request and to spend that night there. On the morrow, when he came to the Master, he asked him where he had passed the previous night. And hearing that he had had to pass the night in the house of his father-in-law, he said, "Ah, what is that? You saw Mother and came back; what a great difference between 'chewing the cud' of the vision and thoughts of Her, which you ought to have done, and passing the night like worldly people in your father-in-law's house instead! One should 'chew the cud', in other words, continue to cherish the thoughts that arise in one's mind in temples and holy places of pilgrimages. How can those divine thoughts stay in the mind otherwise?"

Such is the way to perform a pilgrimage so as to reap the maximum advantage out of it.

¹ "Hearing about God, singing His glories, His remembrance, going on pilgrimage or service to Him, worship, obeisance, friendship, and self-surrender are some of the means."

² N.B. Sutras, 69.

³ Bhagavata, X.48.31.

⁴ 1-37.

⁵ Satvatasamhita.

⁶ Anusasana Parva, 108.20.

Swami Paratparananda

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THE INDIAN mind is very analytical and it stops at nothing until it would arrive at the highest that could be reached; specially it is so in the field of religion. Swami Vivekananda, referring to this characteristic of the Hindu said, 'One peculiarity of the Hindu mind is that it always inquires for the last possible generalisation.' At another time he remarked, 'This analytical power and the boldness of poetical visions which urged it onward are the two great internal causes in the make-up of the Hindu race.' Endowed with this mind, as the Hindus were, they critically evaluated every phase of man's progress in the spiritual life. To them, therefore, all devotion was not one. It was foolish, they thought, to class one who had attained the highest in devotion with a person who had just begun to tread the path; one is like the mature man and the other like a baby in swaddling-clothes. They saw what a vast difference there was in the devotion of the two towards the Godhead. So they classified devotion or Bhakti as *parā* (highest) and *gauni* (secondary).

Why this difference even in the spiritual life, is a naive question. For it is not as the difference that is made in the social or political field, either according to the station in life in which one is placed or to the party which one belongs. It is a difference in the transformation of the inner being. And we have to remember that this difference is not imposed by the person who has attained to *parā* Bhakti upon one who is just beginning his spiritual life, that is one who is still struggling to reach God; but a distinction that is to be marked by those who yearn to progress in spiritual life. For them the lowest man cannot be the ideal. Ideals should always be high, otherwise they cannot be ideals, but only ideas. What Swami Vivekananda said regarding ideals can be profitably remembered here. 'Without the struggle towards the Infinite there can be no ideal.' And again, 'If we cannot follow the ideal, let us confess our weakness, but not degrade it; let us not try to pull it down.' We have to approach all problems of spiritual life keeping this in mind so as not to get confounded by our unfounded and illogical reasoning.

WHAT IS GAUNI BHAKTI?

Gauni Bhakti is preparatory devotion, a stage in the final evolution of parā Bhakti. It is a helpful process by which one arouses and directs the faculty of love towards God. 'It is of three kinds, according to the qualities of the mind of a person in whom it manifests itself; either it may be classified as *sattvika*, *rajasika* and *tamasika*, or it may be divided as *Arta*, and others.'¹ This is a division in keeping with the Hindu tradition, of allowing every person to grow in his own way, according to his mental evolution and make-up. To prescribe a uniform mode of worship of God to one and all, Hinduism feels, is to blind oneself to the actualities of life, to facts, and to stunt, cramp or distort the growth of the individual.

In this preparatory stage man takes the aids of symbols, uses rituals and the like for adoring God. He takes the name of God a certain number of times daily, sings hymns to Him and so on. Again, according to the qualities of the mind of the individual he may perform these things in an ostentatious manner or without any outward show. Sri Ramakrishna in his inimitable way gives the description of these types of devotees thus: 'Bhakti, devotion has its *sattva*. A devotee who possesses it meditates on God in absolute secret, perhaps inside his mosquito net. Others think he is asleep. Since he is late in getting up, they think perhaps he has not slept well during the night. His love for the body goes only as far as appeasing his hunger, and that only by means of rice and simple greens. There is no elaborate arrangement about his meals, no luxury in clothes, and no display of furniture. Besides, such a devotee never flatters anybody for money.'

'An aspirant possessed of *rajasic* Bhakti puts a *tilak* on his forehead and a necklace of holy *rudraksha* beads, interspersed with gold ones, around his neck. At worship he wears a silk cloth.'

'A man endowed with *tamasic* Bhakti has burning faith. Such a devotee literally extorts boons from God, even as a robber falls upon a man and plunders his money. "Bind! Beat! Kill!"— that is his way, the way of the dacoits.'

Again, the *Bhagavad Gita* speaks of four types of people who worship God. One who is moved by a sense of misery, one who is eager to know the correct path, one who is moved by the desire of acquiring some gain and lastly the *jnani*, the true knower of God.² But the last of these does not come under the category of people having *gauna* devotion. He is of the other class, those possessed of Mukhya-bhakti. His love of God is for the sake of God alone.

But we have to take note that man should try to elevate himself from the lower to the higher type of devotion. The *tamasic* Bhakti, for instance, usually is resorted to, to attain some occult power to do evil

¹ Narada Bhakti Sutras, 56.

² Bhagavad Gita, IV, 16.

or gain some end which will entail great harm to others. In this *tamasic* condition of man he does not understand what is good and what is evil for himself; he is moved by his own inertia, indolence and indulgence. Nevertheless, devotion and earnest prayer may lead him on to the right path and save him from much waste of his precious labour and time. His wicked urges would get curtailed under the effect of earnest prayer and ultimately may leave him. He may gradually evolve into the *sattvika* type; so also with those of *rajasic* kind.

Now, *sattvika* Bhakti is nearer to the devotion without taint, Mukya-bhakti, than the others. After a little practice the former slides into the latter. For as the *Bhagavata* says, 'A person, who is devoted to inaction, performs them for the sake of the Most High; or does any sacrifice for the sake of sacrifice alone (without any motive), yet has not gone beyond the idea of difference is of the *sattvika* type.' This little distinction it is that separates him from the Lord and that is why he should persist in his devotion.

HOW TO RECOGNIZE THIS KIND OF BHAKTI

Narada says that this devotion is more easily attainable and recognizable than the supreme Bhakti,³ though the exact nature of devotion defies precise analysis, definition or description.⁵ In man this feeling of love is present as a natural element. There is none so unfeeling as not to have experienced love towards something or somebody, at some time or other. This intrinsic feeling when purified and directed towards God with added strength is called Bhakti. That is why it is told that this devotion is not very difficult to achieve or recognize.

Further proof of possession of this phenomenon of Bhakti is that a peace, that goes beyond all understanding, settles on such a person. He becomes calm, not for the time being, but for all time. This experience of inner peace forms the firm bedrock of all spiritual edifice. Reaching it one is able to understand arguments against godly life as mere baby-prattle.

Yet, should there be a doubt as to how a devotee who is very anxious and always seems to be worried to serve the world can be at peace, it is to be understood that the devotee does not look upon the world as something that needs his help, but as the manifestation of the Lord, his God. He understands that, as a puny creature, he can do but little to help the world and that the Lord who is omniscient and omnipotent needs no help from the devotees to bring about its good. As such though engaged in service the devotee's mind is not perturbed.

³ III, 29,10.

⁴ Narada Bhakti Sutras, 58.

⁵ Ibid., 51.

It is such people alone who are a potent force in the regeneration of the world. By worry and anxiety much of man's energy is wasted, whereas those whose mind is made tranquil can work better and more effectively. From all these distinctive characteristics manifest in a person one can understand that devotion has dawned in his heart.

IN WHAT WAY CAN ONE APPROACH THE LORD?

As already stated love is not a foreign element that is to be introduced into man's nature. It is inherent in him. In the generality of mankind, however, this love flows towards persons closely related, such as father, mother, wife, husband, child, friend or master. Now when this love is turned towards God it may not be far different from this natural love, only the direction, the flow is to be changed. Once an old lady complained to Sri Ramakrishna that though she was eager to do her spiritual practices her love for her grand-child prevented her from doing them. Sri Ramakrishna suggested a simple remedy. He asked her to look upon that child as the Lord Himself and think that she was serving Him alone when she was attending on the child.

That by any type of Bhakti mentioned above one can not only move towards God but realize Him through it, is amply supported by scriptures and proved by the experience of saints and sages. Sri Krishna says in the Bhagavad Gita, 'Whosoever approaches me in whatsoever way even so do I accept him. For in all ways, O Partha, men walk in My path.'⁶ We read that in the ancient times the Gopis, the cowherds of Vrindavan, and Yasoda, the foster mother of Sri Krishna, looked on him and loved him in different ways, knowing full well that he was the Lord Himself incarnate. Coming to the middle ages, Meera, the Rajput princess, and Andal, the South Indian Brahmin girl conceived of God as their consort and realized Him. So too did St. Theresa, St. John of the Cross and others followed other ways to attain the same goal. Other saints of other times too sought and realized Him in various ways.

Almost in our own times one of the women-disciples of Sri Ramakrishna who was a child-widow and was pretty old when she came in contact with the Master, meditated upon God all through her life as her darling child, as baby Krishna. With her practices she had the vision of her Chosen Ideal. It was a marvellous phenomenon. For some months she actually saw with her eyes open, her Gopala. She fed him, put him to bed, and He played with her, snatched her rosary and teased her in innumerable ways. And this happened not in the mythological times, nor *pauranic* ages but towards the end of the last century and beginning of this. Some of the Western disciples of Swami Vivekananda like Sister Nivedita met her and were charmed

⁶B. Gita, IV, 11.

by the simple, unlettered, village lady who had reached the acme of Bhakti by sheer yearning and faith. Sri Ramakrishna himself realized God through all these modes of approach, which in the Vaishnava literature are called *Santa, dasya, sakhya, vatsalya and madhura*, and even more than these.

PARA BHAKTI

We now come to supreme devotion. It is pure devotion untainted by any desire, unmarred by any motive. It is love for love's sake, for the sake of God who is all love. This devotion is one-pointed. Such devotees want nothing else in the world except God. Their life is for the benefit of mankind. One who has attained such a state of devotion is called a *Bhagavata* and a Saint.⁷ They are filled with God and may or may not perform ritualistic worship. 'Hearing about Me but once, their minds become absorbed in Me, who is the indwelling spirit of all, like the Ganges that gets merged in the ocean. This is the sign of Bhakti that goes beyond the gunas,'⁸ says the *Bhagavata*. Again it says, 'That is called the acme of Bhakti by which one transcends the three gunas, and becomes fit to attain My Being.'⁹ Swami Vivekananda speaking about this supreme Bhakti declares, 'When the soul succeeds in appropriating the bliss of this supreme love, it also begins to see Him in everything. Our heart will then become an eternal fountain of love and when we reach even higher states of this love, all the little differences between the things of the world are entirely lost; man is seen no more as man but only as God. . . . Thus in this state of Bhakti, worship is offered to every one, to every life, and to every being.' In the *Bhagavata* there occurs a passage which speaks in an identical language: 'I do not find any one superior to him, whose all actions are dedicated to Me and whose body, mind and soul are given to Me ; because such a person has reached the state of same-sightedness (*samadarsanat*). He bows down mentally to all beings and respects and reveres them knowing that the Lord alone has entered these beings in the form of *Jiva*.'¹⁰

With this intense Bhakti the ego of the devotee gets dissolved. He accepts whatever comes to him, good or evil in the eyes of the world, with an equanimous mind. 'He ceases to distinguish between pleasure and pain in so far as they affect him. He does not know what it is to complain of pain or misery and this kind of uncomplaining resignation to the will of God, who is all love, is indeed a worthier acquisition than all the glory of grand and heroic performances', are some of the outpourings of Swami Vivekananda, about whom Sri Ramakrishna said, 'He is all Bhakti inside and Jnana outside.' Finally

⁷ Bharadvaja Samhita.

⁸ Bhagavata III, 29, 11.

⁹ Ibid., III, 29, 14.

¹⁰ Ibid., III, 29, 32 & 34.

let us conclude with what Sri Ramakrishna says about this divine love: 'Attaining that love (which transcends the three *gunas*) the devotee sees everything full of Spirit and Consciousness. To him "Krishna is Consciousness, and His sacred Abode is also Consciousness." The devotee, too, is Consciousness. Everything is Consciousness. Very few people attain such love. Such a devotee becomes like a child five years old, not under the control of the *gunas*.'

Swami Paratparananda

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SRI KRISHNA says in the *Bhagavad Gita* that the Lord residing in the heart of all creatures moves them by His Maya as dolls mounted on a machine.¹ Christ declared, 'The kingdom of God is within you.'² The Upanishads predicate, 'Projecting it (this universe) It (Brahman) entered into it.'³ Again they claim, 'Smaller than an atom and larger than the largest this Being of Atman is hidden in the cave of the hearts of all creatures.'⁴ Proclamations like these propounding the nearness of God or Atman or Brahman, by whatever name He is called, are extant in all the scriptures and in all languages. Can this be merely a form of speech to encourage the aspirant to move forward? Or is it a fact that is verifiable? It is a little bit confusing. Does it not sound like a paradox — to say that it is nearer than the nearest and, at the same time, to be unable to experience its presence? Exactly so, the situation is almost comical. But there is nothing laughable about it. It is a statement of fact. What is nearer than our own face to our eyes. On that account can we see it without the aid of anything else, a mirror or a reflecting surface for instance. No, we cannot. Yet that is not considered strange. It is accepted as a thing well-known. Rather, to put such a question is considered as something stupid, revealing the depth of ignorance of the questioner. In a similar manner, the Lord though dwelling in our hearts remains unrevealed to most of us.

Why is it so? There are several reasons. Now, let us see what is that which reflects all things, that is, takes cognizance of objects presented before us. It is the mind-stuff (*citta*). This mind can be compared to a mirror. Now, the mirror, as we know, has two sides, one the reflecting surface and the other the opaque one, protected by wood. Now this mirror of the mind is facing outwards in the majority of people and the wooden side is turned inwards. The mind, therefore, takes in reflections of the outside world and not of the Lord within, that is, we are awake towards the world and asleep towards the Lord, all-conscious of the world, and all-unconscious of God. What then is the use of complaining that we cannot see the Indwelling

¹ Gita, 18, 61.

² Gospel of St. Luke, 17.21.

³ Taittiriya Upanishad, 2.6.

⁴ Kathopanishad, 2.20.

Spirit? We have to turn this mirror inwards to see the Lord. That is what the Upanishad also affirms when it says, 'Some intelligent one desiring liberation sees the Indwelling Atman, by controlling his senses.'⁵

How to do this? What are the impediments that are in its way? The attachment that has been generated towards the panoramic beauty of the external objects, in myriads of births, is difficult to get rid of. This has formed, as it were, encrustations around the hinges of the mirror of the mind making it difficult to move even to the slightest extent. Along with this attachment there have developed other foibles like anger, greed, lust, pride, malice, vanity and so on. The list is endless and staggering. Yet it can be resolved into two main impediments, as Sri Ramakrishna puts it, 'lust and greed'; or as Sri Krishna says, into desire or lust — lust for gold, lust for sensual enjoyments, lust for power and so on; or as the Upanishads say, into three *esanas* — *putresana*, *vittesana*, *lokesana* — seeking progeny, wealth and enjoyable worlds like the heavens.

Let us analyse this question. What for is this lust and greed? What is the motive? Is it not for happiness? We have to admit that it is so. But is happiness there in the things of the world — that is the question. Where is happiness? Is it in the objects? If it is presumed that it is in the object, it must always be so. Because happiness will then become the inherent quality of the object, just as heat and light are the inherent qualities of fire. But, this, as we see, is not the case. The same object is seen to give happiness at one time and produce misery at another. The heat of the fire on a chill winter night in a cold climate is welcome, whereas the same on a sultry night in summer is unbearable. How then can the happiness be in the object? Now, it will be said that it depends on place, time, and object. Well, given all these suppose the mind is disturbed on account of some calamity that has happened or is impending. Will man then be happy by any number of outward attractions? No. So, it naturally follows that happiness is not in the object but is a condition of the mind. The objects are only instrumental in stimulating happiness or misery. The main part, therefore, is played by the mind.

Again, the mind, under pressure of circumstances, changes its likes and dislikes. This shows that it is pliant and not rigid. If so, why not make it take an interest in one's own being. That is possible. It has been done heretofore and it can be done again. Only the mind should be freed from its entanglements. The mind has mixed itself hopelessly with the world. We have allowed the world too much to get into the mind. To take an illustration from Sri Ramakrishna, the milk of the mind has been too much mixed with the water of the world, for every seer of milk there is five seers of water in it. Such is the condition of our minds. The water is to be dried up if you have to get the taste of pure milk and then only can it curdle. First, we have

⁵ Ibid., 4.1.

to free the mind of all desires. It may be asked: Why not satisfy the desires and finish with them? No, that cannot be done even if we were given millions of lives. For desires are endless. As soon as one of them is satisfied, a hundred spring in its place. A mind with desires is like a desert ever thirsting for water. It is an unquenchable thirst. Buddha found out that this *tanha* (*trsna*) was at the root of all misery. This running after the things of the world — what a host of things it brings in its train! Anger, jealousy, hatred all are its camp followers and makes the mind a seething cauldron of discontent.

Again, to quote Sri Ramakrishna, 'The disease of worldliness is like typhoid. And there are a huge jug of water and a jar of savoury pickles in the typhoid patient's room. If you want to cure him of his illness, you must remove him from that room. The worldly man is like the typhoid patient. The various objects of enjoyment are the huge jug of water, and the craving for their enjoyment is his thirst. The very thought of pickles makes the mouth water; you don't have to bring them near. And he is surrounded with them.'

So the wise said, 'withdraw the mind from the objects of enjoyment'. How can this be done? By restraining the senses that feed the mind continually with the sensations of their objects. The eye looks at beautiful things and tempts the mind; the ear conveys sweet sounds and entices it; likewise the other organs of touch, taste and smell ensnare it. It is by avoiding the sense objects and by directing the mind Godward that the mind can be gradually brought under control, and not by giving free reins to desire. The *Kathopanishad* has resorted to a beautiful allegory to elucidate this point. There the body is compared to a chariot, soul to its owner, intelligence to the charioteer, mind to the reins, sense organs to the horses, and sense objects to the roads. 'The body when conjoined with the senses and the mind is called the enjoyer (*bhokta*) by the wise',⁶ continues the Upanishad. What it says in the next verse is a thing that is to be remembered always by aspirants to the higher life. 'One who is ignorant, and perpetually of uncontrolled mind has his sense organs rebellious like the wicked horses of the charioteer.'⁷ Sri Sankara commenting on it explains in detail: 'If the intelligence, which is the charioteer, is ignorant, not smart, indiscriminate, as to what to engage in and what to abstain from, and allows the mind, which is in the position of the reins, loose, to wander, then the sense-organs, being like the unbridled and wicked horses, will be impossible of control.' And the result will be that the chariot, along with the owner will soon come to grief.

But the task of retrieving the mind, is difficult, tedious and long. There is no easy way. Let us be clear about it. Never was any treasure unearthed by the mere knowledge of its situation. Never was success achieved in any field without exertion. And how foolish it is of

⁶ Ibid., 3.4.

⁷ Ibid., 3.5.

man to think that he will be able to attain the Highest without shedding the sweat of his brow, without spending sleepless nights and restless days in its pursuit! It is only idle fancy of man to think so. It is as Sankara in his *Vivekachudamani* very pointedly brings out, 'To announce oneself an emperor, without destroying the enemies, without acquiring sovereignty over the kingdom.'⁸ Goethe, the German poet remarks, 'Happy the man who early learns the wide chasm that lies between his wishes and his powers.' All this shows that nothing can be obtained merely by wishing.

Now, there are two methods by which one can arrive at this taste for higher life: One is by allowing the mind to experience the sweet and bitter fruits, that it is so fond of, until a very bitter one makes it pause and think as to whether this is all what is meant by enjoyment. The second is by discrimination. The first method is for those who will not listen to sane advice, nor would believe in the existence of a hereafter. The second is for those who had already experienced the meaning of enjoyment either in this life or past ones.

In the first case no amount of outside pressure is of any avail. In their case we have to leave it to nature to work its course. So we pass on to the other. Here definite rules have been enunciated. The mind having been in the world cannot be withdrawn from it all of a sudden. The mind, which has been practised to one way of thinking, cannot immediately change to quite a contrary way. The ephemeral nature of the things of the world, must first dawn on it, then will come the reassessment of values. With it will come dispassion. This dispassion to take firm root should be strengthened by discrimination. Discrimination between the Real and the unreal — that God alone is real and all else is unreal. This idea is to be repeatedly and constantly impressed upon the mind. The idea should also be followed up in practice incessantly and for a long time, until it becomes natural. The mind will resist doggedly; it will try to run in the old ruts, because there is no resistance there. Such a lapse or tendency is to be prevented. It is a life-long vigil. A spiritual aspirant can never afford to be slack or sloth in his watch over himself without the fear of losing his moorings. Sri Ramakrishna says, 'Through the discipline of constant practice one is able to give up attachment to "lust and greed". By practice one acquires uncommon power of mind. Then one doesn't find it difficult to subdue the sense-organs and to bring anger, lust and the like under control.' The *Gita* also says the same thing: 'By practice and renunciation can this wavering, fickle mind be controlled.'⁹ But Sri Ramakrishna also warns even those who had attained a high state of spirituality to beware of allurements of lust. How then can persons on the lower plane of the spiritual path presume to be neglectful!

Further, along with these two, discrimination and dispassion, a

⁸ Vivekachudamani, 64.

⁹ Gita, VI, 35.

yearning to see God or realize one's true nature should be cultivated. For mind cannot remain in a state of vacuum. It wants some support, something to think about. Therefore, along with dispassion a zeal to realize God will keep it occupied, engaged and prevent it from being 'a devil's work-shop', from back-sliding. And this yearning for God will help to strengthen dispassion. 'As one proceeds towards the east, the west is left behind', says Sri Ramakrishna. So too, as one proceeds toward God the pull of the world becomes less. Or to use another simile, the needle when it comes into the magnetic field is immediately attracted by the magnet. If, however, the needle is rusted or covered with mud and the like it fails to feel the magnetic pull. Constant practice of meditation, along with discrimination and dispassion is like cleansing the needle. But to be caught in the charm of the higher life early, is a grand thing. Such people are then like fresh flowers as yet untouched by the blight of worldliness; a little exertion sets them free. They are like dry matchsticks that catch fire with the slightest friction. They have to struggle only a little.

II

Man comes into this world with a load of propensities, ill or well. These, as it were, force him into a particular mould of character. They are all-powerful in a normal man, and make him their slave. But these propensities were created by man himself, by his actions in the previous births as man, say our scriptures. For man alone has been endowed with intelligence to distinguish good from evil whereas other animals have not that capacity. Therefore, according to the manner in which an individual had used his intelligence and according to his actions, the propensities were formed in his mind. And this mind does not die with the body. It, along with the subtle body, transmigrates from one gross body to another or from one sphere to another according to the fruits of its actions. With too much of evil deeds or animal-like actions the soul transmigrates into an animal or insect body or becomes even as herbs or plants. Only when the karma is in a balanced state the soul appears in the human body.

Swami Vivekananda says that as man has created these propensities, he can, if he is earnest, as well create fresh and better ones to counteract the old ones. By doing good deeds and thinking good thoughts fresh *samskaras* are created. Thoughts are as much harmful or beneficial as actions themselves. For is it not constant dwelling on an idea that goads man to action? Besides, thought leaves an impress on the mind for the future, as a seed to further germinate when circumstances become favourable. This has been poignantly described by Sri Krishna in the Gita, 'When man constantly thinks of the objects of the world, attachment grows toward them. From attachment is born desire and lust. And when these desires are obstructed then anger is generated. With anger delusion overtakes the mind. This results in the beclouding of memory, and thence takes

place the bankruptcy of intelligence, which in its turn leads to the spiritual death of man.’¹⁰ How to counteract these forces has been dealt with in detail on previous occasions. Here we shall simply enumerate them. Restraint of the senses, holy company, practice of discrimination and dispassion, as mentioned above, solitude, taking God’s name, performance of good deeds, meditation, a loving disposition towards all creatures, developing an altruistic outlook and above all intense yearning for God are some of the means to employ to overcome worldliness.

One more means which Swami Vivekananda has given to us is to do *karma* in the *Gita* fashion. To put it in his own words: ‘Work for work’s sake,’ without caring for name or fame or going to heaven. ‘To work just because good will come of it.’ Further he adds, ‘There are others who do good to the poor and help mankind from still higher motives, because they believe in doing good and love good.’ ‘Love, truth and unselfishness,’ Swamiji continues, ‘are not merely moral figures of speech, but they form our highest ideal, because in them lies such a manifestation of power. In the first place, a man who can work for five days, or even for five minutes without any selfish motive whatever, without thinking of future, of heaven, of punishment or anything of the kind, has in him the capacity to become a powerful moral giant.’ This is the means which people living anywhere and in any station of life can try to follow, to become morally pure, nay even to attain the Highest.

How to do unselfish work is also taught to us by Swami Vivekananda in the following words: ‘We have to begin from the beginning, to take up the works as they come to us and slowly make ourselves more unselfish every day. We must do the work and find out the motive power that prompts us, and, almost without exception, in the first years, we shall find that our motives are always selfish; but gradually this selfishness will melt by persistence, till at last will come the time when we shall be able to do really unselfish work.’

A wholesome advice of Sri Ramakrishna as to how to wean away the turbulent mind from its worldly occupation will be immensely helpful to all *sadhakas*. He says, ‘Nothing can be achieved without discrimination and renunciation,’ and adds, ‘it is not possible to acquire renunciation all at once. The time factor must be taken into account. But it is also true that a man should hear about it. When the right time comes, he will say himself, “Oh yes, I heard about this.” You must also remember another thing. By constantly hearing about renunciation one’s desire for worldly objects gradually wears away. One should take rice-water in small doses to get rid of the intoxication of liquor. Then one gradually becomes normal.’ Worldliness is like intoxication, and hearing about renunciation is like taking rice-water to get rid of this intoxication.

¹⁰ Ibid., II, 62&63.

I

THINGS in nature are in a state of flux, every moment they change. The seed that is sown sprouts in a few days and becomes a plant, puts forth buds, and the buds blossom overnight. A few hours and they too wither away yielding place to fruits, sometimes. The moon revolves round the earth and the earth round the sun, every moment. The whole universe is in the vortex of activity. It cannot rest for fear of its annihilation. But eternal activity is an impossible conception. There must be periods of rest following activity. In everything created we find it. Maybe the period of activity and rest in some cases can be counted in terms of hours, while in some others (as in the case of the earth) in millions of years. All the same, if nature is built on any definite plan, if from the construction of the microcosm any conclusion as to the cosmic process can be drawn it should be admitted that there must be periods of activity alternating with periods of rest, in the universe as a whole. Hindu scriptures support this view. They speak of the cyclic theory of manifestation, when they say: 'The Lord projected the sun and the moon (and the other beings) as on the previous occasions.'¹ The Hindus do not say that this life of the earth or of the universe is all that has been in the womb of time. Creation, in their opinion, had no beginning. It is only alternately rest and projection.

However, if it is asked: Why then do the Upanisads speak of a 'beginning' when they say: 'The Existence alone, without a second, there was in the beginning'? Sri Sankara replies, that the 'beginning' here refers only to the present cycle of creation. And what was there at that time (in the 'beginning') is described in one of the most beautiful concepts in the Rig Veda which in Swami Vivekananda's words is given here: 'Then there was neither aught nor naught, nor air, nor sky, nor anything. What covered all? Where rested all? Then death was not, nor deathlessness, nor change of night and day. That existed, that breath, covering, as it were, that God's existence, motionless.'² Further, the Vedas wonderfully picture that indescribable first state as 'Gloom existed in gloom.'³ Persons

¹ Rig Veda, 8.8.48.

² Chāṅgogya Up., 6.2.1.

³ Rig Veda, 8.7.17.1&2.

⁴ Ibid., 8.7.17.3.

living in villages, far away from cities, might have some faint idea as to this. They would have noticed that calm of the gloomy night of the New Moon, which instils awe and almost fear into the traveller. Imagine now how much more calm there would have been in that 'gloom in gloom'.

But coming to the calm, there is the calm before the storm, there is also the calm of the sultry night, when the wind tired of blowing has gone, as it were, to take rest in some distant cave. But what a vast difference between the two types of calmnesses — the one that was before the projection of the universe and the others enumerated above. In one there is all the assurance of placidity, in the other all the fear of the impending calamity. In the one there is the soul-soothing coolness, in the other there is the presence of unbearable discomfort. In the one there is peace, in the other there is anxiety.

A remote resemblance to this soul-soothing tranquillity can be met with in the calm of the mountains, of the Himalayas. The mountain-retreat holds a direct contrast to the hectic and mad whirlpool of activity of the world, caught in which poor man loses all his bearings and moorings. Far away from the madding crowd, secure in the contemplation of his own self, man, in the retreat, not only retires from the world outside, but also withdraws from the worlds he is creating within. Perhaps a very near parallel to that indepictable calmness can be experienced in the dreamless sleep. Here, in dreamless sleep, we get an idea, though yet a little vague, of what equanimity is.

II

All creation is rushing back to gain this equanimity — this disturbed balance, though unconsciously. Human beings too do it, some unconsciously and some consciously. Aye, that is the difference between man and the other creatures — he can strive consciously to possess that equanimity. For man is a peculiar phenomenon, perhaps, the most wonderful creation of nature. It is only he that manifestly goes against nature. He fights with it tooth and nail. Though created with a frail constitution he has survived all the onslaughts of mightier animals and of subtle pestilences as well. He has harnessed the forces of nature to serve his needs. He has delved into the depths of nature's secrets, and is trying to gain mastery over them. But fighting external nature forms only a fraction of the total struggle. With all his conquest of the outer forces man is still not in a happy position. His inventions of all sorts give him pleasure, for sometime, no doubt — we shall say, give him excitement — but that only increases the tension on the nerves, increases the horrid torrent of unrest. Tranquillity does not come with these pleasures; instead a deep void soon develops, a wide chasm soon opens, as a reaction.

However, this running after the pleasures too is done with the view to attain that Infinite Bliss, to forget everything else, but only mistakenly, as one thirsty in a desert takes the mirage as an oasis and runs after it. A large majority of mankind mistakenly takes these pleasures as the be-all and end-all of life. Why so? How does the error arise? It is said in the Upanisads that the joy which the beings live by is an infinitesimal fraction of that divine Bliss.⁵ The error has arisen because mankind has taken that little insignificant fraction of bliss to be the Infinite. That is how they are misled. For that divine Bliss cannot be found in the finite things; in the Infinite alone is the complete Bliss.⁶ It is a fact, that has been assured by the Hindu scriptures, that ultimately everyone will reach that Infinite Bliss, because all this has come out of It, live in It and in the end will return unto It.⁷ But that may take aeons and also transmigration through millions of lives. Inert things and unthinking beings may bide their time, but a human being should consciously make efforts to regain that 'kingdom of heaven', and then it will come.

III

Why do we say that the gaining of this equanimity, serenity, is a step towards that Bliss, nay that Bliss itself? Because bliss can reign only in a place undisturbed. On the placid surface of the lake alone can objects be reflected. Again, in that Infinite Bliss there is no movement, as at the beginning of creation. That is why all Teachers call upon us to cultivate this virtue of equanimity, poise. For instance, Sri Krishna speaks of a *sthitaprajña*, one of steady wisdom. Mark the words 'steady wisdom'. It is not a wisdom that is every moment changing. Neither does it mean knowledge in the ordinary sense of the term. We can have a faint conception of what it is, if we go through the description of *sthitaprajña* given in the Gita. Sri Krishna describes the state of such a person of 'steady wisdom' thus: 'When one annihilates all desires, arising in the mind, and is satisfied in one's own self by the self, then alone that one is called a man of steady wisdom' Every word here is significant. It is to be noted that desires are to be annihilated and not merely subdued. For the subdued ones may arise again and work havoc by taking toll of the subject for all the subjugation it has suffered. Again the word 'all' is very important. There is no via media in that, no concession, no compromise, 'all desires' have to be burnt. We may not show out our hankerings, but they may all be there in the mind. That too is dangerous. They should all be wiped out even from the

⁵ Taittiriya Upanisad, 2.8.

⁶ Chandogya Up., 7.23.1.

⁷ Taittiriya Up., 3.6.

⁸ B.Gita, II.55.

mind. The definition does not end here, it continues 'satisfied in one's own self by the self'. What is the meaning of that? It means that for such a man's satisfaction, contentment, no outer agency is required, not even the dreams or imaginations of pleasure. His mind knows nothing at that time except the presence of the Ātman, the self, effulgent and infinitely blissful. When man attains to such a state, then alone can he be said to be of 'steady wisdom'. *Samādhī*, the acme of all spiritual life, is not far from such a person. As Sri Ramakrishna says it is like the appearance of the dawn in the east showing that the sun will rise before long.

Continuing Sri Krishna says: 'Unperturbed in calamity and unattached to happiness, devoid of attachment, fear and anger such a one given to contemplation is called a man of steady wisdom'. This is another sketch of such a person, which explains, as it were, the previous description. The world teachers do not leave us in suspense as to what they say, as to what is good for us. They want to be as explicit as possible, as unambiguous in their idea as the vehicle of language can convey it. They come down to our level of understanding to do that. Sri Krishna probably felt that posterity may misconstrue what he has said and go wrong. He did not like that it should be so. That is why he elaborates the idea. We may put on a brave front when we are in distress but all the same there may be trepidation in our hearts. But courage born of strength is a different thing altogether. Swami Vivekananda cites the example of a sage who was unperturbed by the threats, of Alexander the Great, to kill him if he refused to accompany him to Greece. Swami Vivekananda describes the episode thus: 'And the man bursts into a laugh, and says, "You never told such a falsehood in your life, as you tell just now. Who can kill me? Me you kill, Emperor of the material world! Never! For I am Spirit unborn and undecaying, never was I born and never do I die, I am the Infinite, the Omnipresent, the Omniscient; and you kill me, child that you are!"' That is the serenity of the sage which Krishna refers to. It is born of the realization of Truth.

Again, Swamiji speaking about fearlessness gives an example of a sannyasin, 'who used to repeat "Shivoham" — "I am Bliss Eternal", and a tiger jumped on him one day and dragged him away and killed him; but so long as he was living, the sound came, "Shivoham, Shivoham"'. That is equanimity, that is being steadfast in wisdom, to be fearless even in the jaws of death, to be one with the Ātman, to be 'satisfied in the self by the self' and also 'to be devoid of attachment'. For what else is so precious to one as one's own body? Is not all the struggle of the ordinary run of mankind to keep this body intact? It is so. Yet here was one who did not think even of the body as anything better than the rags he wore.

To such alone can realization come and not to cowards. 'This

⁹ Ibid., II.56.

Atman cannot be attained by the weak, neither is it attainable by errors, nor without having recourse to renunciation,¹⁰ says the *Mundakopanisad*. Sri Sankara commenting on this verse says that the word *pramāda* (error) that is used here means possession of or hankering after son, wealth, fame and the like. It is this error that involves man more and more into bondage. So beware says the scripture. The Upanisad continuing says, 'That wise person, who strives by these methods, enters the realm of Brahman,'¹¹ the realm which is of the nature of perfect tranquillity, of immortality.

We are familiar with the episode of Yājñavalkya and Maitreyi. Perhaps part of it may bear repetition here: When Yājñavalkya imparted his wish to retire to the forest, to his two wives, and with that end in view wanted to divide his assets between them, the intelligent Maitreyi asks him, 'My lord, can I become immortal if this whole earth full of wealth comes into my possession?'¹² 'No, no,' replies Yājñavalkya, 'there is no hope of immortality through wealth.'¹³ 'If so,' replies Maitreyi, 'what shall I do with that which brings me no immortality. On the other hand tell me about that which can bring that state.'¹⁴ That is the type of non-attachment born of discrimination. This non-attachment, being free from desires, that is spoken of in the Gita, is not a passing phase. It is of a permanent nature. Serenity sometimes comes to any man, after the fulfilment of his ambition or some of his desires. But it is very short lived. A gust of wind in the form of some other ambition, blows this serenity away. A starving man will have no wild desires, but in him the hankering after them is not burnt away. It is dormant, in the seed form. When his body returns to normalcy all these wild desires get hold of him again. But the restraint of the man of steady wisdom, when he has realized the Highest, is of quite a different type. It is natural and results in enormous good. It is then that the state of equanimity becomes an accomplished fact. There is no fall from there. 'Attaining this divine state one is not deluded again; one who rests in it even at the time of death, attains Nirvana in Brahman,'¹⁵ says the Gita.

A question may crop up here: When everything is changing and changeable how can this state alone be of a static, permanent nature? To this we ask: Does a fried seed sprout? No; it does not. Likewise with God-realization, attainment of *samadhi*, one is not attracted to the lower life. The seeds of desires are, as it were, burnt, their vitality to germinate is lost. Sri Ramakrishna puts across this idea very exquisitely: 'Suppose there are two magnets, one big and the other small. Which one will attract the iron? The big one, of

¹⁰ Mundakopanisad, 3.2.4.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Br. Up., 4.5.3.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., 4.5.4.

¹⁵ B. Gita, II.72.

course. God is the big magnet. Compared to Him woman is a small one.' By 'woman' Sri Ramakrishna means lust, and we can include the other desires also. This analogy, however, should not be stretched too far, by asking why should not all be attracted by God, if He is such a big magnet. The question is superfluous, for this pull can be experienced only by those who have felt God, realized Him. Others who are far away from Him cannot feel the attraction, as iron placed beyond the field of a magnet does not respond to its attraction, though the strength of the magnet has not diminished in any way.

We referred, above, to the state of things when the creation was yet not projected. How did the Rishis come to know of it? Through their realization. They came to know that what was before the creation ought also be what it will be when it dissolves. And in *samādhi* everything dissolves. What there is cannot be described. It is like the dreamless sleep infinitely projected, but producing wonderful results. A word picture of this state — similar to that given in the Vedas. cited above — is drawn by Sri Ramakrishna:

'When the mind reaches the seventh plane, then the ego vanishes completely and the man goes into *samādhi*. What happens when the mind reaches the seventh plane cannot be described. Once a boat enters the "black waters" of the ocean, it does not return. Nobody knows what happens to the boat after that. Therefore the boat cannot give us any information about the ocean.' The mind is in the condition of the boat that entered the "black waters", uncharted ocean of Brahman. In such a man the mind which could have taken pictures of the things, gets merged in the Ātman or Brahman, in that state. That is why we draw a blank there. But this state is not one that is to be dreaded. For it is a state getting into which all bonds are cut asunder, all doubts are shattered, resolved, and fruits of one's actions are worn away.¹⁶ Is not then such a state, of perfect equanimity, covetable?

IV

Now we come to the method of attaining that state. Practice is absolutely necessary to attain any end. Swami Vivekananda remarks, 'You may sit down and listen to me by the hour every day, but if you do not practise, you will not get one step further.' That is a fact of experience with all. Further, we have to impress upon our mind that the means adopted to achieve an end should be as unsullied as the perfection, the goal, which we covet. 'You cannot attain what is infinite by finite things,'¹⁷ says the *Kathopanishad*. Similarly, you cannot attain a noble end by diabolical means. The state of equanimity, is a very high one. So, whatever qualities the

¹⁶ Mundakopanishad, 2.2.8.

¹⁷ Kathopanishad, 2.10.

man who has achieved that end possesses — enumerated in the scriptures — are to be the means by which one can hope to reach that state. One has also to go beyond the sway of the three *gunas* in order to do that. For the *gunas* bind man down to this earth. Sri Ramakrishna has compared these *gunas* to robbers. The first one (*tamas*) kills, the second one (*rajas*) leaves you bound, the third one (*sattva*) releases you, but cannot take you to your goal. For that you have to go beyond them and be without them. That is what Sri Krishna also advises Arjuna, 'The Vedas deal with subjects that are in the domain of the three *gunas*. O Arjuna, go beyond the three *gunas*.'¹⁸ Here by 'Vedas' is meant mainly the actions enjoined by them for attaining heaven and the like. Thus from all points of view, we see that, one has to be rid of all material yearnings to attain this state of everlasting equanimity.

¹⁸ B.Gita, II.45.

Swami Paratparananda

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BEING SIMPLE seems to be a natural trait in the spiritually advanced souls. Rather,— as Christ said, 'Unless ye be as children, ye cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven,' — this child-likeness is an incumbent precursor to the vision of God, realization of Truth. For Truth is simple and unless one becomes simple one cannot see It. But this simplicity, this guilelessness baffles people. For they are often after the grand and dazzling things, which are complex and more complex. A simple village life is thrown off for the more complex and involved life in the cities, for the varieties of entertainments it provides, the attractions and enticements it holds forth. In a similar way the life of the world with its sweet and subtle changes, overtakes man quite unawares and slowly but surely captivates him and draws him into its fold and then smothers him there. For the sake of variety and change man runs after novelty and forgets the Simple, the Truth, and fails even to recognize the harbingers of peace and realizers of Truth. They go unnoticed.

For a long time people of Calcutta used to consider Sri Ramakrishna as a mad man, because he never recognized the value of anything except in and through God; because he, for a long time, was completely oblivious of his surroundings in His contemplation, in short, because he did not follow the norms of the mundane world. Even the so-called enlightened who used to visit him used to say that he was dull and had no faculty for organization. Today we see how misled these wiseacres have been. Their names and all they boasted of are forgotten whereas Sri Ramakrishna has come to live in the hearts of millions for ever. But such is the delusion that this complexity of the world spreads over us, that we take what is transitory as eternal.

Sri Sarada Devi, the consort of Sri Ramakrishna, better known among the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna as the Holy Mother, was likewise unknown as a Teacher of mankind in her own right, for a considerably long time. Even some of the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna could not know about her high spiritual stature till after a few years of the Master's passing away. They in the beginning respected her as the consort of their Guru. But soon they came to know that she was no ordinary mortal.

Sri Ramakrishna paid her the highest respect by worshipping her as the embodiment of the Divine Mother one day at Dakshineswar, as a culmination of his spiritual practices. He showed great deference to her wishes and held her in great reverence. The Master alone knew who she was. We shall narrate here some instances to show how he regarded her.

Hriday, who was the Master's attendant for several years, in his last days with the Master was becoming selfish and money-minded. When his wishes were thwarted by Sri Ramakrishna's refusal to be a tool in his hands for his earthly ends, he got annoyed, became abusive and ill-treating. Seeing this growing tendency in Hriday Sri Ramakrishna warned him, 'You may be saved if the person residing here (showing his own body) is angered, but beware if she (the Holy Mother) gets annoyed. Not even, Brahma, Vishnu or Maheswara can save you then from her wrath.' On other occasions Sri Ramakrishna referred to her as the Goddess of learning, Sarada, come to impart knowledge. But in spite of repeated assertions to this effect, coming from good authorities, man often forgets to recognize divine personages. This is what Bhagavan Sri Krishna too opines in the *Gita*: 'The ignorant disregard Me, who am embodied in a human form, not knowing My higher nature as the Great Lord of beings.'¹ How few recognized him as the Lord! Even Arjuna his closest associate was unaware of this fact until Sri Krishna himself revealed this secret to him.

Why does this happen? The Lord when He embodies behaves like any other human being. He has hunger and thirst, His body has disease and decay. How then can any one distinguish Him unless one has penetrative and divine eyes (*divya caksus*). Yet, simple and unsophisticated people recognize Him more easily than others. For instance, in the Krishnavatara, the simple cowherds and cowherdesses of Vrindavana were blessed with that wonderful insight to probe into the mysteries of the divine. What a wonderful prayer it is with which the Gopis address the Lord — the Gopigita of the *Bhagavata*! The garland-weaver of Mathura and Kubja, the maid-servant of the palace of Kamsa, could discover Him because they were simple and had faith. In the Ramavatara Shabari, the forest-woman, could find Him out.

That is the secret of divine personalities. They come. Yet, very few can find them out unless they reveal by themselves their true nature. In Sri Ramakrishna, people according to their evolution in spiritual life, saw a good man, an unspoilt child of nature, a great saint or an Incarnation. People came in contact with him often, witnessed his ecstasies and so it was easy for them to come to any one of the above conclusions. But the Holy Mother was almost a recluse. She was so modest that she never stirred out of the Nahabat, where she stayed while at Dakshineswar, when anyone was about, so much so that it is said that when some one asked an officer of the temple whether the Mother lived there, he seems to have replied, 'Yes, we have heard that she lives here, but have never seen her'; so unknown did she live. Her prayers, her practices were all in secret. Her ecstasies and *samadhis* were unknown to others except a few of her close women devotees. How then could anyone know of her true nature?

The first revelation of her lofty spiritual disposition comes to us from the eye-witness Yogin-Ma, a woman disciple of the Master.

¹ Gita, IX, 11.

Though the Mother used to have her moods of rapt absorption, perhaps she was not aware of them herself. So one day she asked Yogin-Ma, 'Dear Yogin, please speak to the Master that through his grace I may experience samadhi. On account of the constant presence of devotees, I hardly get any opportunity to speak to him about it myself.'

Yogin-Ma reports, 'I thought it was quite right and I should carry out her request. So next morning when Sri Ramakrishna was alone in his room I went to his room and after saluting him in the usual way communicated the Mother's prayer to him. He listened and suddenly became grave.' When the Master was in that mood none dared utter a word, so after sitting for a while the devotee left the room. When she returned to the Nahabat she found the Mother seated for her daily worship. She opened the door a little and found her in a strange mood, now weeping, now silently laughing. Yogin-Ma says, 'Tears were rolling down her cheeks in an unceasing stream. Gradually she became very much absorbed into herself. I knew she was in *samadhi*. So I closed the door and came away.' This was, however, not a solitary instance; like the Master she would naturally go into an exalted mood at any incident that happened to be of some spiritual significance. After the Master's passing away these moods were more frequent in her. In Vrindavana she had the experience of the highest state of *samadhi* as well.

We have seen already that the Holy Mother had the highest spiritual realizations and was times without number absorbed in divine moods. But that does not preclude us, from inquiring if she was aware of her Divinity. Instances there are in her life which show that in spite of all her efforts to hide herself, sometimes, unknown to herself some words escaped from her lips that intimated that she was perfectly aware of her Divinity. At such moments 'she would compare herself to Lakshmi, the divine consort of Narayana, speak of herself as the Mother of all beings or admit her capacity to confer liberation on any one.' But often the very next moment, perhaps thinking that she was giving out a secret which people did not understand, she would change the topic to make the utterance appear as a casual remark of no consequence. It was left for the discerning disciple about her to take proper cognizance of the words. The disciples were given the chance to know what her real nature was. And if they had the good fortune to possess enough acumen they would know her, in spite of her later protestations to the contrary.

Here, we shall give some instances from the Mother's life in illustration of this: Once a woman disciple of the Mother went to her Calcutta residence. She was resting after lunch. The disciple sat by her and began to fan her. Suddenly she heard the Mother speaking, addressing no one in particular, 'Well, you all have come here. But where is Sri Ramakrishna?' The disciple in her memoirs writes, 'I replied, "We could not meet him in this life. Who knows in which future birth we shall be able to see him? But this is our greatest good fortune, that we have been able to touch your feet." "That is true, indeed," was the brief remark of the Mother.' This was a rare revelation by the Mother, who liked to

pass herself off as an ordinary mortal.

But whenever earnest devotees wanted to know who she was, she would ungrudgingly own to them her Divinity. "Once a devotee worshipped her feet and kept them on his head. Mother remonstrated with him and said, 'the Master himself stays in the head, God Himself sits on the thousand-petalled lotus there.' The disciple at once asked, 'Mother, if the Master is God Himself, who are you then?' Without hesitation the Mother replied. 'Who else should I be? I, too, am the Divine Mother.'"

On another occasion she installed and worshipped her own portrait along with that of the Master at the Ashrama, at Koalpara, a place not far from Jayarambati.

To another devout disciple, who had heard of her being spoken of as the Primal Energy, as the Universal Mother and so on, and was eager to know it from her own lips, she did not withhold the secret. 'Yes, it is so', was her answer.

There is an interesting episode in the Mother's life which happened after the Master's passing away. The Mother was once going to Jayarambati from Kamarpukur. Her little nephew, Shivaram, was following her with a bundle of clothes. When they were in sight of the village of Jayarambati some thought crossed this young boy's mind. He fell back. The Mother did not appear to notice it and went on. But as she missed his footfalls she looked back and saw him standing motionless at a distance. With surprise in her tone she asked, 'What's the matter Shivu? Come along?' Shivu didn't budge; instead he called out, 'If you would tell me who you are, I shall come.' Mother wanted to put him off, so she said, 'Who should I be? I am your aunt.' Unsatisfied, he replied, 'Then go, there you are near your house. I won't proceed further.' It was evening, Mother was worried as to what to do with the boy. There was no time for the boy to reach Kamarpukur before nightfall, neither will he go to her house. In this predicament she could not leave him alone. Still, she said, 'Look at that. Who, indeed, can I be, my dear? I am a woman, your aunt.' Shivaram, however, was insistent, 'Well, you can go then,' said he. At last the Mother had to yield. She said, 'People say I am Kali'. 'Is it true', asked Shivaram. 'Yes,' replied the Mother. Delighted at that Shivaram said, 'Now let us go.' Then only did he follow her into the village.

Another time a devotee was taking leave of the Mother at her house at Jayarambati. As she was bidding him good-bye she remarked, 'Call on me,' but the next moment she said, 'Call on the Master. He is all.' Lakshmi Devi, the Master's niece, who was present on the occasion said to her, 'Mother, why should you confuse them thus?' Mother replied, 'Why? What have I done?' Lakshmi Devi said, 'Well, Mother, did you not say, "Call on Me" and then bewilder him by saying, "Call on the Master"? 'Why?' argued the Mother, 'Calling on the Master is calling on all.' Lakshmi Devi, however, was not distracted. She impressed on the devotee 'that what he had heard from the Mother was very valuable; that it was a declaration, as well as a direction by the Mother herself, that he should call on her.'

An incident which happened at Rameswar when the Mother visited the temple of Shiva at that place may be recalled here. When the Mother saw the uncovered emblem of Shiva at the temple she said to herself, 'Ah, It is just as I had left It.' Devotees, who were around her, inquired, 'What did you say, Mother?' Mother at once, as it were, drew into her shell, 'Oh, a meaningless something escaped out of my lips.' A revelation was made to the devotees and they believe that one who came as Sita, the faithful consort of Sri Ramachandra, and worshipped the emblem of Shiva on the coast of Rameswara, had again descended as the Holy Mother.

Girish Chandra Ghosh, a house-holder disciple of the Master and a first-rate genius, had a unique mystic experience about the Mother. He was one of those of the Master's disciples who did not at first think highly of the Mother's spiritual greatness; so it will all the more compel our attention.

Some years after the Master's passing away Girish, along with some of the monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, went to Jayarambati. That was the first time that Girish was taken to Holy Mother's presence. Girish prostrated before her, stood up and looked at her once and immediately left the room. He sat in the outhouse musing and serious. Others who were with him were astounded at his behaviour. Then one of them, Swami Niranjanananda, asked him the reason for such a change. He requested the Swami to inquire of the Mother if she was not the person who had appeared to him in a dream in his nineteenth year. Mother sent him word that she was. Then Girish narrated his experience: how he was seriously ill in his nineteenth year; how he was given up for lost by the attending physicians; how one night in that condition he dreamt that the whole firmament was lit with a divine light; how it proceeded towards him and took the form of a Goddess; and how the Goddess put something in his mouth, resembling the consecrated food of the Lord of Puri, uttering soothing words and vanished. He remembered the Goddess again as soon as he had seen the Holy Mother, he said.

It is necessary to point out here that the Mother was most unassuming all throughout her life though she came to know who she really was. There was not a trace of egoism in her, nor was there in her any tendency to carve out a position in society. Therefore, she had no patience with people who were not convinced of her divinity, but out of mere plagiarism would call her the Divine Mother. She would silence such of them effectively and pointing to the picture of the Master say, 'He is everything. He kindly gave me shelter at his feet.' Only the deserved got an opportunity to have a peep into her personality. To others she behaved like an ordinary mortal ever busy with the household chores — dressing vegetables, scouring vessels, cooking and the like. Sri Ramakrishna referring to this modest trait in her used to say, 'She is like a cat covered with ashes, hiding its true colour.'

Until the centenary of her birth, in 1953, very few people outside the pale of the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna knew about the Holy Mother.

She became known to the world during the celebrations. Today people from distant parts of the world go on pilgrimage to the place of her birth, Jayarambati, and thinking about her feel blessed. A nunnery to provide shelter for women who are in earnest to pursue the life of renunciation has been started in her name on the centennial day of her birth not far from Dakshineswar, near Calcutta. Shrines dedicated to her are being built now. Slowly, the Mother is revealing herself more and more.

Swami Paratparananda

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TO CALL on God by His hallowed name is as old as religion itself. In the Rig Veda, Agni, the presiding deity of fire is hymned profusely. For it was Agni who was to carry the oblations offered into the mortal fire to the higher gods. Indra, Varuna and the like are the other names that we come across there. But Indra of the Rig Veda is not the same as of the Puranas. Indra was considered as the supreme deity, having overlordship over all the worlds. For the matter of that all names, says the Rig Veda, are of one and the same God. Those are not several gods but the same God addressed variously by different sages.¹

"Name and form" constitute the whole phenomena of the universe. You cannot recall a form without referring to its name. And conversely also when you think of the name, the form too spontaneously comes before the mind's eye. So, as long as man is aware of these differences of 'I' and 'you', world and its objects, he must have recourse to names and forms of God also. And we have to remember that persons who are able to go beyond the idea of the phenomena are very few. People may be able to give splendid discourses on Advaita but those who have attained the *nirvikalpa samadhi* state alone can do without 'names and forms'. But it will be the height of absurdity if everyone that has a smattering of the knowledge of the scriptures thinks himself competent to tread such a path.

Again, taking the Divine Name is a wholesome method by which spiritual aspirants can turn their psychological being to good account. Man by the principle of association of ideas connects up life and actions. If by this principle man hooks his train of thoughts on to God and His blessed attributes it would be easier for him to approach God. Every day, every minute of his waking state man is engaged in this pursuit, nay even in dreams this principle works. So what is required is only a shift of the centre of attraction— from world to God.

A very high place has been given by the sages of antiquity to the Divine Name. Narada, Vyasa, Shuka, Shandilya, besides the sages mentioned in the Vedas, are some of those who laid great store on the repetition of the Lord's name. Again, it is not Hinduism alone that prescribes God's name as a means to realization. Christianity, Islam and other faiths too have the same consideration for it.

¹ R.V. II. Iii.22.

TRADITION

Taking the Divine Name as a means to God-Realization is a long-standing method. If we go into the religious history of India, or for that matter of any country, we will find that this process is time-honoured and very effective too. By repeating the Lord's name alone people have attained to the Highest. And our sages have in unequivocal terms declared this with all the firmness and certitude at their command. For it has been a tried and well established practice. People for ages have put faith in these words of the sages and have enshrined the Divine Name in their hearts.

In India, particularly, the Divine Name is taken with all solemnity before the commencement of any undertaking great or small, auspicious or even otherwise. Protected by the name they feel sure of themselves in their endeavour. People have become so much accustomed and habituated to take the Name that even unconsciously they do not take a step without uttering it.

It is a great source of power armed with which a man of faith defies the world to do him any harm; nay, he even defies death with a challenging voice, 'O Death where is thy sting?'

Sings Ramaprasad, a poet-mystic of Bengal, praising the efficacy of the *Name*:

*I have surrendered my soul at the fearless feet of the Mother;
Am I afraid of Death any more?
Unto the tuft of hair on my head
Is tied the almighty mantra, Mother Kali's name.
My body I have sold in the market-place of the world
And with it have bought Sri Durga's name.
Deep within my heart I have planted the name of Kali,
The Wish-fulfilling Tree of heaven;
When Yama, King of Death, appears,
To him I shall open my heart and show it growing there.
I have cast out from me my six unflagging foes;
Ready am I to sail life's sea,
Crying, "To Durga, victory!"²*

Replete is the religious lore of India with songs that depict vividly the glories of God's name. A host of saints and sages from every part of India can be quoted in support of this. A parable is told of a crow that preferred to die of thirst but would not lose the time, it was utilizing in taking Rama's name, to slake its thirst.

Religious literature of India is full of the names of God. There are the *astottaras*, and the *sahasranamas*, (the hundred eight and thousand names) of every name of God, to remind the aspirants about the exploits

² The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, p.245. Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras-4.

of that particular form or aspect, or Incarnation of the God-head. People there are who cannot live or breathe without taking Lord's name, without tasting its divine bliss. For the believing and the trustful their one ambition in life is to make their exit from this world with the Lord's name on their lips. To do it they retire from all worldly entanglements and cares and live in holy places like Varanasi during the later part of their lives.

God's name is very efficacious in more ways than one. In the Bhagavata we read of Ajamila's episode: Ajamila was a brahmana by birth but after living for a long time the life required of him according to his station fell on evil ways, infatuated with lust. In that condition of his, he fell seriously ill. He despaired of his life. He saw the messengers of Death approaching. In his anguish he cried out to his dearest son, who was fortunately given the Lord's name, Narayana. Now, it is said, that the name of the Lord though unmeaningly uttered brought to the scene Vishnu's messengers who disputed the right of the messenger's of Death to take away a soul that had become pure by the repetition of God's holy name. Ajamila was spared his life that time and was given an opportunity to mend his ways and attain the Lord's abode. Man cuts off the bonds of birth and death if he remembers the Lord at the time of his death — is an assurance of Sri Krishna.

The Lord's name does not go in vain. It must bear its benign result. It is like the philosopher's stone converting all baser metal into gold. It is like the magic wand of the magician performing unbelievable and unthought of miracles; the only difference being that in the latter case it is of a moment's duration, whereas in the former it leaves a permanent impress on the devotee. It transforms man's life for ever.

Man seeks refuge in God's name also when he is confronted with difficult situations or involved in crises. Innumerable stories are extant which go to illustrate this fact. When Draupadi was being subjected to insult and humiliation in the court of the Kauravas it was Krishna's name that saved her honour. When Radha, the cowherdess of Vrindavana, was asked, as a test of her chastity, to bring water in a multi-holed pitcher it was with the name of the Lord that she came off more glorious than ever, out of this fiery ordeal. The great hero of the *Ramayana*, whom Tulsidas calls the 'jewel in the great garland of *Ramayana*', Hanuman crossed the ocean to Lanka merely by taking the name of Rama. These are not fictitious stories, but explanations to illustrate the principles.

There is a beautiful story, told to emphasize the identity and inseparableness of the Lord and His name. Sri Krishna was once being weighed against gold and ornaments. Even when all the gold and jewels of his palace were heaped in the other pan, Krishna's pan did not move up nor was it balanced. Then Rukmini, the divine consort of Sri Krishna, had put in the place of the ornaments a *tulsi* leaf with Sri Krishna's name written on it on the counter pan to weigh the Lord. And lo! The pan moved up and there was the Lord weighed against His own name. Such really is the potency of the Lord's Name. It has its peer only in the Lord, nothing else can compare with it.

SCRIPTURAL INJUNCTIONS

We find references as to the efficacy of the Name in the Rig, Yajur and Sama Vedas, which prove that it is not a later development in religion. One *mantra* reads: 'O, Glorious, all-pervading Lord, we use no sacrificial stakes, we slay no victims but we worship Thee by mere repetition of Thy name.'³ The minor Upanisads, the *Ramayana*, the *Gita*, and the *Mahabharata*, and the *Bhagavata* and other Purāṇas overflow with hymns and injunctions that enjoin this practice of taking the Name of the Lord, on the devotees. The *Yogasikhopanisad* defines a mantra as a 'holy formula', 'because of its scope for reflection, because of its saving power, because it reveals the Lord's nature and also because it forms the Lord's abode', and thus helps to realize Him. 'Rama established by his conduct and life the path of Righteousness and the path of knowledge by His name,' says the *Ramapurvatapani Upanisad*⁴. The *Mahabharata* declares, 'The aspirant always repeating the name of the Lord, reflecting on its meaning and observing the vows of Brahmacharya attains the highest.' Sri Krishna says in the context of His *vibhutis*, 'Among yajñas I am the *japa yajña*.'⁵ Thus we find that the recourse to the Name as one of the methods to God realization has been known from time out of mind.

IN WHAT WAYS CAN THE NAME BE TAKEN

The well-known forms of taking the Lord's name are many. *Mantra Japa*, repetition of the holy formula given by a competent Guru is the most auspicious and helpful. Next comes singing hymns and songs in praise of or describing the exploits of the Lord. Sankirtana, singing in chorus the names of God, is also another method. Formal worship by offering the five, ten or sixteen articles or even mental worship (*manasa puja*) is still another. Here, we may remind ourselves that worship when done conscientiously, noting the meaning of all the mudras and rituals, which to the uninitiated and the ignorant may appear meaningless, can burst open the flood-gates of devotion and knowledge.

EXAMPLES AND PRECEPTS OF INCARNATIONS

The world has before it the shining examples of the Avatars, their apostles, sages and saints to demonstrate what the Divine Name can do. Sri Chaitanya, an ultra logician of his times even up to the day of his initiation into the name of God, was a changed man at the very first mention of the Name by the Guru. All the stored up waters of devotion flowed then onwards like a mountain torrent carrying with it all that

³ Sama Veda II.2-9-2.

⁴ I.4.

⁵ Gita 10.25.

impedes or resists its path. The entreaties of his pupils to the life of the scholar and teacher, of his mother to the life of the householder were carried away in that current. The pull of God was irresistible for him; and in his turn his own attraction too became irresistible to many.

Sri Ramakrishna stormed the citadel of God with nothing but the name of Mother Kali. All his other *sadhanas* may be said to have come after the first vision of the Mother. The Divine Mother could not hold Herself back from the earnest call of Her dear child. He almost forced Her to yield him Her presence. We know that Sri Ramakrishna breathed his last uttering the name of Kali and entered into *mahasamadhi*. In the life of the Holy Mother we read how incessantly she repeated the Name in spite of her varied duties of the household and onerous responsibilities of the spiritual ministry. She set for herself a huge number for her *japa*, but she did it regularly till the last days of her life. Her day dawned at 3 in the morning and her time for rest arrived only at 11 in the night, yet the repetition of the Lord's name continued unhampered.

In the disciples of Incarnations too we find this trait prominently present. A look at the life of the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna in the initial stage of the organization will amply hold out this fact. In the very throes of penury, of suffering and privacy there flowed a constant stream of divine bliss expressing itself now and then in the form of Sankirtan, songs and ecstatic dances, at the Baranagore Math.

It may now be said: 'O! Well, it is all right with the Incarnations and their apostles who were pure from their very birth or who had mighty Gurus to help and guide. But what about us who have a load of inherent tendencies to overcome?' To this we draw attention of such people to the precepts and the assurances given by these holy men. We have to follow in their footsteps; there is no other way. When we despair, observing no progress in our spiritual life, let us hearken to the words of the Avatars which bring solace and infuse confidence. Here is Sri Chaitanya telling us: 'The name of God has very great sanctity. It may not produce an immediate result, but one day it must bear fruit. It is like a seed that has been left on the cornice of a building. After many days the house crumbles and the seed falls on the earth, germinates and at last bears fruit.' Even in the case of ordinary vegetation we have to wait for the season to yield fruits and how then can we be impatient when it is concerned with the highest fruit of life!

Again, Sri Chaitanya says that it is not possible in this Kali age to do the sacrifices enjoined in the Vedas on their elaborate scale, nor is it possible for every one to do them. For the Kali age, therefore, he avers, the name of Hari alone, without any doubt, is the path for liberation.

Sri Ramakrishna confirms that by chanting the Lord's name one gets rid of all the dross of the body and mind; and in a purified mind reflects the image of God in all splendour. One of the songs of another poet, that Sri Ramakrishna cherished very much, describes what merits accrue to one who takes the Divine name:

*Why should I go to Ganga or Gaya, to Kasi, Kanchi, or Prabhas,
 So long as I can breathe my last with Kali's name upon my lips?
 What need of rituals has a man, what need of devotions any more,
 If he repeats the Mother's name at the three holy hours?
 Rituals may pursue him close, but never can they overtake him.
 Charity, vows, and giving of gifts do not appeal to Madan's mind;
 The Blissful Mother's Lotus Feet are his whole prayer and sacrifice.
 Who could ever have conceived the power Her name possesses?
 Siva Himself, the God of Gods, sings Her praise with His five
 mouths!⁶*

Sri Ramakrishna gives the example of a devotee, Krishnakishore, who though a brahmin had no hesitation in drinking water from the hands of a person of low-caste when he had uttered Shiva's name. Another time Sri Ramakrishna said, 'A man was about to cross the sea from Ceylon to India. Vibhishana said to him: "Tie this thing in a corner of your wearing-cloth, and you will cross the sea safely. You will be able to walk on the water. But be sure not to examine it, or you will sink." The man was walking easily on the water of the sea — such is the strength of faith — when, having gone part of the way, he thought, "What is this wonderful thing Vibhishana has given me, that I can walk even on the water?" He untied the knot and found only a leaf with the name of Rama written on it. "Oh, just this!" he thought, and instantly he sank.'⁷

Sri Ramakrishna's parable of the milk-maid and the Guru is amazingly revealing as to what faith in the Name did to the disciple and how the teacher himself could not get over doubt.

Holy Mother too in her teachings has exhorted us to be devoted to the Divine Name. In the Bible also we have certain passages glorifying Name. We shall quote a few of them here. 'Let them also that love thy name be joyful in thee' (*Psalms*, 5.11). 'Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name', (Ib. 29.2). 'O, magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together,' (Ib. 34. 3-4). 'Make a joyful noise unto God, all ye lands: sing forth the honour of his name: make his praise glorious,' (Ib. 66.1-3), 'I will lift up my hands in thy name,' (Ib. 63.4).

However, real faith in the potency of the name can come out of one's own personal experience. We, therefore, leave it to every reader to find out the truth of this thesis by consulting his own experiences in life. Even an average man might have received a response from on High when he in his difficulty had called on Him.

HOW TO TAKE THE NAME — THE MODUS OPERANDI

It is easy to say that we should not at all discuss how we are to take the Divine Name. But the question remains whether we should take the Name to gain material ends, with ulterior motive. It cannot be

⁶ The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna. P.76.

⁷ Ibid., p.33.

gainsaid that such a step is not proper. It may lead to material prosperity, no doubt, for the Lord like a kind mother will bestow on us whatever we pray for, but it will throw us into the whirlpool of innumerable births and deaths. It is religion which comes to help us out of this predicament. And religion being the most practical of all the sciences under the sun, any practisant will find out in no time that utmost caution and guidance are required to chant the Name effectively.

When one chants it with due regard and propriety, said Swami Vivekananda once, one can have both Bhakti and Jnana through it. Again, we sing in the *Ramanama Sankirtan*, '*dhanyāste krtinah pibanti satatam sri rāmanāṁāmrtam*,' 'Blessed are those virtuous persons who drink the nectar of immortality of Sri Rama's name.' Shall we not try to become blessed!

In conclusion, we have to impress on our minds that purity of thought and sincerity of purpose are the essential conditions one has to achieve and develop in the religious life if it is to be expeditiously fruitful. He must practise Brahmacharya, physically and mentally. He has to avoid all slips in the ethical life and should live a life of discipline. These are the *sine qua non* of the higher life, and it is well-known that nothing will happen if *sadhana* is practised perfunctorily. So, when that purity of purpose and sincerity in *sadhana* is achieved and when one tries in secret and in solitude and with single-minded devotion to repeat the name of God, His vision will come and the devotee will get absorbed in Him.

By Swami Paratparananda

* Editorial of The Vedanta Kesari Magazine – February 1965; Vol. 51; page 487

AN INTERESTING question posed by thinkers, who somehow have a vague knowledge that divinity is the true nature of the human beings, is: 'If we are all sparks of the same divine Spirit, what need is there for one man to help another to realize it?' It is an intelligent and sincere poser. One can feel that the inquirer is sincere. Perhaps a little of everything has disturbed such a mind — and there are so many new philosophies springing up, enough to confuse any ordinary man.

What is the answer for such an inquiry? Let us probe the inquirer. How does he know that he is a spark of divinity? Does he know from his own experience or from books or literature or other persons? Well, if he has known that from other persons or books he has defeated his own question. For if he can believe in certain things said somewhere and by some persons what prevents him to believe in the necessity of trusting in the efficacy and usefulness of a spiritual guide, a person, perhaps, more regular in his prayers and meditations, sincere to the backbone in his spiritual life, and of pure and unsullied character? This of course the inquirer cannot answer except by conceding that his assumption was wrong. Still he may feel that his query has gone unanswered. So let us turn to the practical side of the question. Let us take the example of a child busy with its play. The play has absorbed him and he forgets his studies. Is it not necessary that the mother should remind him of his studies? In the spiritual world we are all children until we have reached the summits of realization. We need the guide, the Guru to remind us, nay actually help us overcome the obstacles in our path.

Why cannot we do so by our own efforts? Maybe it is possible in very rare cases where the yearning for God is intense, where the renunciation is like a blazing fire, but for the ordinary aspirants a spiritual guide is essential. It is true that our nature is divine, that we are the children of Immortality. But are we aware of the fact? How many days in a year are we conscious of this fact and how many minutes in a day? We have to confess that it is very rarely that we are aware of it. The idea of spiritual practices is to become aware of this divinity more and more. Again, the spiritual paths are numerous, which one should a particular aspirant select? All these intricate questions are solved by the true teacher by his insight into the life of the disciple. Otherwise, the aspirants will be tempted to try whatever path presents to them as alluring, as easy. It will be like digging for water now here and now there but not sufficiently until one reaches the springs. One has to be persevering and persisting if one has to achieve any result in spiritual life at all. Merely floating on the water will not get us the gems that lie on the bed of the ocean. One has to dive and dive deep says Sri Ramakrishna.

The *Kathopanishad* warns the would-be aspirers after the spiritual life rather sternly: 'It is not given to many even to hear about this. And even hearing about It many do not understand. Wonderful is the teacher and fortunate is the obtainer of this teaching. Still more wonderful is the one who understands It when taught by a wise one.'¹ Many a ship of life has

foundered on the uncharted seas of this life. A wise pilot is therefore incumbent. If even after repeated instructions we are not able to understand the Highest Spirit then how can we by our own effort reach it!

Taking for granted that some day the spark in us may blaze out if conditions become conducive, how do we know that other circumstances will allow it to burn? If, for instance, a huge load of wet firewood is heaped over the dying embers would they be able to consume the firewood? Never. The fire itself may be smothered and die out soon. But supposing one who knew how to kindle that spark, would wisely handle and make it glow brighter by adding dry leaves, were to help, would not then the same fire be able to burn even a forest? Man's condition is almost identical. A host of tendencies are smothering the divine spark and making it impossible to gain a better view of that divine glow. Lust and greed are the two chief burdens which weigh down on his mind making it impossible for him to be conscious of his divinity at all.

Sri Ramakrishna's parable of the grass-eating tiger very aptly describes man's condition. The tiger which as a cub was left in the midst of sheep, even before it had drunk its mother's milk, quietly followed the ways of the sheep — eating grass and bleating while threatened with danger. One day another tiger attacked the flock and when it saw a tiger bleating and running away, it was surprised. However, it caught hold of the grass-eating tiger and asked, 'why are you running away? You are a tiger like myself'. But the grass-eating tiger would not believe it. Then the other tiger dragged the latter to a pond; showed it their reflections in the water and then pushed some meat into its mouth and roared. The grass-eating tiger thus convinced of its nature and having tasted the meat, roared in response. Here is how the true teacher helps an aspirant. We have forgotten our true nature and caught in the meshes of the world believe ourselves to be sheep. So doubts arise in our minds even when we are told that we are divinity itself. The other tiger is the Guru who makes us aware of what we are.

Now, let us take another illustration. Swami Vivekananda gave the example of sowing a seed. 'Do you grow the plant?' he asked. No. The vitality to germinate is in the seed itself. You cannot infuse that vitality into it. 'What you can do is to put it in the proper ground, water it and thus help it grow.' You only remove the impediments and obstacles in its path and allow it to grow of itself. Likewise the divine spark in man is to be felt, not simply theoretically known. The work of the Guru is to help the disciple feel It, realize It, by finding out and removing the impediments that block his path.

We have only to look at the way in which Sri Ramakrishna trained his disciples to understand this relation between the Guru and the *sisya*. There was first his selection of the proper disciples and then his training of them. He knew the past, present and future of those whom he took in his hand to mould as his disciples. It is not Sri Ramakrishna alone that possessed such powers. Jesus too, had had it before him. Did not Jesus choose some of his disciples from fishermen? The Incarnations could at a glance know the nature of any man with whom they were brought in contact.

Knowing thus their inmost thoughts the Incarnations could correct their disciples whenever they would have gone wrong. Jesus foretold his fall just a day or two prior to his crucifixion: 'One among you shall betray me.' And they were sad that the Lord did not believe in them. But was this prophecy not fulfilled? Again, he said to Peter, 'Thou shalt deny me thrice before the cock crew,' and was it not fulfilled? Did not Peter staunchly deny that such a thing was possible for him? Yet how did it come to happen? This shows Jesus could see not only what was going to take place for himself but also what thoughts were

going to rise in the minds of those near him. This proves that the Incarnations of God do have the power to know everything they want to know. Nothing lies hidden to their gaze. That is why they have the highest place as Gurus, as teachers of mankind, for all time.

Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual ministry was a wonderful phenomena. It is like a panorama of everchanging hues, ever attractive and never tiring, the spectral play of colours, however, pointing to the same goal-post viz., God. Sometimes he would make his young disciples roll on the ground with side-splitting laughter by his humour; at other times he would sing to them songs about the divine and transport them to an exalted region. Again, there would be discussions on the philosophies of the different sects at different times. And yet again he would urge them on to meditation and austere living. Once when a disciple said that he tried to meditate but that his meditation was not deep, was not undisturbed, Sri Ramakrishna wrote something on the disciple's tongue and sent him to the secluded Pancavati at Dakshineswar. The disciple even as he went towards the place was losing his outward consciousness and lost all outer consciousness as soon as he sat under that tree. He came to himself, to use a mundane expression, only when Sri Ramakrishna stroked his body from chest downwards. Numerous are the instances in the life of the Master and his disciples wherein the Master did accentuate the spiritual potential of the disciples.

The question may be asked: Why do you then say that there is divinity in every human being if it is to be attained by hard struggle and by the help of a teacher? For the simple and obvious reason that an object cannot change its nature and remain the same. We have not heard of cold fire or hot ice, except as a way of expression. If fire were not hot, of what use is it then? An object can manifest only what is inherent in it. If man was not divine he could never become one. But our experience is quite the opposite. We see divine personages manifesting themselves and human beings turned divine. So the proposition that man is not divine but attains divinity is also not true. What happens by the efforts is that he uncovers himself, discards the encrustations surrounding him one by one. The only acceptable and rational solution, therefore, is that man is divine, call him a spark of divinity or a child of God or what you will.

Now we come to the assistance that the Guru really renders to the disciple. Spiritual life has some matters that are to be taken on trust, matters which you cannot fathom by reasoning. But it is not a fact that religious living is devoid of all reasoning. Reason is given the fullest scope in the Hindu religion and philosophy. You are free to question and inquire, but when it becomes a case of mere argumentation, there the ancient sages drew a line.

For reason would be blind when there was no comparison to make. Reasoning is possible and helpful as far as the phenomenal world is concerned. If you have to infer, you have to draw a parallel and what is there that can compare with the transcendental life? If the transcendental can be reduced to the phenomenal it would no more remain transcendental; in other words transcendental can never become the phenomenal. The laws of the phenomenal world can, therefore, never apply to the transcendental. The Atman, for instance, cannot be seen by the eye, not even the most powerful microscope can reveal it. But it is the inmost being of man. When man dies something goes out of him. It cannot be held back, for it is not visible. But that something, which was moving the body and making it live even prior to the moment of death, was in the body cannot be denied. Spiritual life deals with that being, the Atman. Therefore, as you would go to learn music from a musician and not from a professor of logic, so we have to learn about the science of the soul from a spiritual teacher alone. Because he knows or will find out what our aptitudes and what our inclinations are and guide us accordingly.

Human beings are not all alike; they have different tastes and various natures. Perhaps, we all agree with this statement. Now, what is better — to allow man grow in his own natural way which comes easy to him or force him to follow a rigid, fixed and hidebound pattern of discipline, which surely will mutilate and destroy his nature? The Hindu sages have thought it better to allow man grow in his own way towards God; they did not try to modify his inherent nature. That is why there are so many paths, to approach God, described in the Hindu scriptures. So also about the form or formlessness of God that the aspirant likes to worship. A particular form of God appeals to one man most and thereby he is able to concentrate his thoughts on God easier, whereas there may be other forms which though of the same Divine Spirit do not awaken any response in him. It is the Guru who finds out what form of the Deity suits each disciple, selects a mantra or a sacred formula by which he may call on Him, and instructs him how to proceed on his path. All this the Guru does with no motive at all. The Guru's sole desire is that the disciple should realize God, should get away from the meshes of Maya, of the world. It is motiveless compassion, self-less love that drives the Guru to take all the trouble to awaken the disciple's spiritual potential. So we see what a high place the true Guru occupies in the realm of the spirit. He is looked upon as the father, mother, friend, philosopher and guide. Like a father the Guru chastises when we go wrong, like a loving mother he helps when we falter, like a friend he keeps us company in our difficulties and like a philosopher he advises when we are in a quandary.

From all these it is quite apparent that the Guru occupies a supreme position in the life of the spiritual aspirant. A great many hymns have been written on the Guru, of which the *Guru-Gita* is famous.

The *Mundakopanisad* gives the description of a true teacher: a *srotriya*, one well-versed in the scriptures - and *brahmanistha*, established in Brahman.² Sri Sankara in his *Vivekachudāmani* enlarging on this concept and in keeping with the Sruti passages says that one possessed of the deep spirit of inquiry and renunciation should approach a Guru, 'who is versed in the Vedas, sinless, untouched by desire and a knower of Brahman *par excellence*; who has withdrawn himself into Brahman; who is calm, like the fire that has consumed its fuel; who is an ocean of compassion that knows no reason and a friend of all good people who bow down before him'.³ That is the true teacher approaching whom we are certain to find our path and abiding peace.

¹ Kathopanishad 2.7.

² 1.2.12.

³ Vivekachudamani, 33. 33.

RELIGION AND THE YOUTH

Swami Paratparananda

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THERE IS a beautiful verse by Sri Śankara which depicts how man escapes God. Aye, man does evade God. God is ever attentive and seeks man with all His might but finds him happy with the red bright toys of the world. He calls but man does not listen, does not respond or at the most says, "wait, I shall finish this game and then I shall attend to you". 'As child he is engaged in play, as youth in mirth, as old man in deep worries, alas in the Supreme Reality no one is engaged, none interested,¹ says Śankaracharya. The old man's worries are numerous: 'How shall I live; how will my body get over this disease or that feebleness', and similar myriad other worries peck at him. Man sees all these, perhaps, laughs at the old man's clinging to life, yet does not think that he also will one day have to pass through the same path and face a similar situation. Youth has vigour and therefore being optimistic loses himself in enjoyment and mirth. To a certain extent the parents too encourage him to lose himself in the world, for they are afraid to put anything that speaks of religion in his way, lest he should leave them all and seek God.

To many religion may mean a following of a certain code of conduct, an observance of certain rituals and creeds, a practice of particular dogmas, one or all of these; but that is not what we mean here. Religion is an experience which results in the conversion of man to the Divine. However, this does not mean we ask any one to throw overboard all rituals and creeds. They are necessary and essential but are only steps of the ladder to religion. Let us hear Swami Vivekananda about what real religion is: "Realization is real religion, all the rest is only preparation – hearing lectures, or reading books, or reasoning, is merely preparing the ground; it is not religion." All morality, all ethics, all good works, all rituals and creeds are a preparation for religion to dawn into our hearts. Others are only the chaff while the seed is realization of the Ultimate Reality.

There is a maxim going round at present, 'Catch them while young'. And this has been made effective use of in very many fields of man's activity, especially in the most hazardous tasks such as mountaineering. This enthusiasm to infuse into the youth a spirit of adventure, a spirit of responsibility is very good and is being tried in scientific fields also. But this idea is not anything new to India or religion. In a minor Upanisad there occurs a passage which says: "Be religious while still young; otherwise pointless, aimless will be man's life."² An aimless life is like wild grass, it grows and is uprooted but grows again, serving no one's purpose. Naciketa, in the *Kathopanishad* impresses on his father the necessity of following the righteous

¹ Charpatapanjarika stotram.

² Bhavasantarapanishad, 1.41.

conduct: 'Seeing,' says he, 'how the righteous acted in the past and how also the saintly ones act in the present try to follow them in the proper way of life. Grieve not that you are sending me to the abode of *Yama*. As corn ripens and falls and then grows again man is born and dies.'³ What remains to man is what good or bad he does in this world; for that goes to shape his future life. So a man who aspires for the eternal life which never undergoes any change, that is to say, wants to realize the Absolute Existence, must stick fast unto truth. For none can hope to gain truth by error. Man travels from the lower truth to higher truth and never from error to truth. So, if we are not careful to cultivate the lower truths here and now, how can we hope to reach the higher truths later!

However much the present generation may encourage the youth to secular adventure, it thinks that serious attempt at religious life may be left out for a future date, and an indefinite future it always becomes. Once when a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna was asked by someone, why he should renounce the world at such an early age, he put the inquirer the counter question : 'What certainty is there that I will live up to a ripe old age — the age when you say I can give up?' The questioner was silenced, for it was an irrefutable statement though unpalatable. But truth does not wait to sweeten anyone's taste. Sri Krishna says, 'That which in the beginning appears like poison but in the end tastes like nectar, that joy, born of the clear understanding regarding the Atman, due to purity of the mind, is said to be of the *sattvika* type.'⁴ Verities and values of life must be weighed, understood and acted upon in this light.

Why should man be religious while still young? Not only from the standpoint of uncertainty of life but also for other reasons men, who really seek God, should be religious while they are still in the prime of life. For once an attachment is cultivated, once character is formed it is any body's guess that one could reform oneself. That is why, Sri Ramakrishna used to praise his young disciples so much. He would say, 'Their minds are untarnished with worldly desires . . . They are like kneaded clay which can be moulded into any shape . . . Their minds are like new vessels into which milk can be kept without fear of turning sour.' That is why people must be earnest in spiritual life while young, before they receive impressions of the world. Swami Vivekananda has repeatedly stated how every thought we think, every action we do goes to form a part of our character. These acts and thoughts leave an impress on the mind which sinks to the sub-conscious. So, though these impressions are not always manifest they lie on the ocean-bed of the mind to rise again at a call, as it were, when circumstances become favourable. So what would you like to have in your mind? Definitely every one will like to be good. But will this goodness come if we don't work for it? Can one be a musician or an artist if he does not assiduously practise even supposing that he has a natural bent towards it? If any one says he can, the lives of the musicians and artists all over the world give the lie to such a supposition. So, one must work at the foundations, then only can a strong and beautiful edifice of character be built. And that foundation is the young age. Lose the chance and you lose a great deal. For this birth in a human body is very rare indeed. Our sages have declared this time and again. Sri Śankara in the opening verses of the

³ Kathopanishad, 1.6.

⁴ Bhagavad Gita, 18.37.

Vivekacudamani makes this very explicit: 'For all beings the human birth is difficult to obtain, more so a male body; rarer than that is Brahmanahood, rarer is the inclination to lead a life according to the Vedic religion; erudition in the scriptures is still more rare; next in the higher scale of things come discrimination, to differentiate between the self and the non-self, Realization, and being established in the state of identity with Brahman. This kind of Liberation is not to be attained without the merits of a hundred crore of births.'⁵ The Upanisads too emphatically lay down that a man who passes away without realizing the Atman loses a great deal. Witness what the *Kenopanishad* exhorts: 'If a man realizes (the Atman) here, then it is a fruitful birth, if not it is a colossal catastrophe.'⁶ The catastrophe is not only due to the loss sustained of this life but is also due to involving oneself inevitably into the round of births and deaths; for no man can escape this cycle except when he realizes God.

Yājñavalkya brings home this truth to the sages, assembled in the court of Janaka, when he relates to his questioner, Gargi, that 'one who departs from this world without knowing this Immutable, is miserable.'⁷ Śrī Śankara commenting on it observes that such a one is miserable like a slave bought for a price. Why should he be miserable? Because when one departs without realizing God he remains bound by the fruits of his actions and would be dragged into this world repeatedly like a slave. That is misery indeed.

Now, there is a false notion, current among many, that religious life is meant for the old and the infirm, the decrepit and the weak. It is a gross misrepresentation of facts. Swami Vivekananda asks a pertinent question, "which is the greater of the two strengths: (1) to allow the horses run headlong or (2) rein them in effectively; which one is the stronger: one who is carried along the current or one who swims against it successfully?" Religious life is swimming against the current; it is a reining in of the mad horses of the senses. As every one knows it is easy to slide down an inclined plane; it is easy to let yourself be carried away along the current but to swim against it is a very hard job. Similarly it is easy to say that one can work on the path of religion in the old age. But it has never been done unless one has been steadily working towards it from a very early period. From a distance a mountain looks very smooth but try to climb it and you will find what a quantity of thistles and thorns, pot-holes, ups and downs and ditches and mounds you have to tread. The spiritual path is like that, from the outside it looks so easy but come to brass tacks with it and you will feel its hardship. It is like walking on the sharp edge of a razor, so difficult is the path.⁸ One should be ever on the alert, one cannot afford to be relaxing in the least, on this path, if one wishes to make some progress.

It is only when the senses are subdued and when the mind is brought under control that a real taste for the higher values of life develops. A strong physique alone can help a mind to be strong, to be unyielding to temptations. Is this possible for a weakling? A weakling may not be able to err on the physical side but he is also unable to stand the strain of spiritual disciplines. The Upanisads declare, 'This Atman is not to be attained by the weak, nor by false steps, nor by mere knowledge

⁵ Vivekachudamani, 2.

⁶ Kenopanishad, 2.5.

⁷ Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, 3.8.10.

⁸ Kathopanishad, 3.14.

without renunciation. The Self of the wise one, who strives by these alone enters the abode of Brahman.⁹

By *these* in the Śruti text are understood (1) strength, both physical and that born of the intellectual conviction regarding the existence of the Atman, (2) to remain aloof without being caught in the net of the world, (3) intense thinking and austerity, and (4) renunciation. In the face of these tested truths does it not look like childish insistence to say that religion is for the weak and the infirm? What is the equipment of the old man: a bundle of habits deep-rooted as to assume the propensity of not only second nature but of the first nature. Is it possible for such a one to break easily through that nature? Such a man's thoughts perforce run into the old ruts, so assiduously cultivated by him. A least deviation from the thoughts, which have become basic, will be resisted by his mind vehemently. Let each man, therefore, try for himself and see how difficult it is to get over even a simple and single habit. Let him encounter the struggles and annoyances he would have to undergo to overcome this habit, and then let him visualize, the time, the effort and heart-wrenchings one has to suffer to reform one's life. Unless one gets into the practical field one will not understand how idle is anyone's hope to gain the kingdom of heaven through indolence. Except you get into the water you will not know the difficulties of swimming. It is so in the field of religion also.

II

It is no doubt a matter of common experience that man has some inherent tendencies in him. They are inborn, are there from his birth. And this is one of the fundamental conceptions, not only of Hinduism but also of Buddhism and Jainism – we mean the theory of Karma and rebirth. It has already been discussed on a previous occasion and therefore need not be repeated here. It has also been found out that it is the best explanation that can be given for the wide diversity that we see in the world. Diversity not merely regarding material possessions but also regarding physical dispositions, intellectual accomplishments and the like.

Now we may ask: If man is bound by the fruits of his past actions how is he responsible for his present doings? To a certain extent this may be true but man having the capacity to shape his future must not leave things to themselves. In him there is also the capacity to resist all the powers that press him down. Does he not fight against all odds to improve his material conditions? Therefore, if past actions went to form man's present birth it naturally follows that his present actions can make or mar his future. 'Never a doer of good actions, O Arjuna, comes to grief,'¹⁰ assures Sri Krishna in the *Gītā*. So instead of wailing at one's circumstances one should put in all efforts to proceed onwards from where he is placed.

⁹ Mundaka Up., 3.2.4.

¹⁰ Bhagavad Gita, 6.40.

III

A great many factors influence man from his childhood onwards. It is the example of the parents that influences the child in the beginning and childhood is the most impressionable age. At that time the child simply imitates its elders. So it is very necessary that the parents and elders who happen to come in contact with the child, every moment of its life, should be of commendable character. There is a story in the *Mahābhārata*, of a queen, Madālasa, who sang to her babies even from the cradle about the glory of the Atman, which was their true being. They were so much impregnated with the idea that when they grew up they renounced the kingdom and the palace and everything to realize God. It happened in the case of the first boy and the second and the third. The king was flabbergasted. He did not know how to prevent a repetition. The fourth time the child was taken away from the mother to be brought up elsewhere to become a king. 'As he was leaving home the mother gave him a piece of paper which he was to read when he grew to manhood. On the paper was written, "God alone is true, all else is false; live alone or keep the company of holy men". When he grew to manhood he read the note and renounced the world.' That is the way children are influenced. Even a queen in those days thought it her own responsibility and duty to bring up her children, to nurse them and serve them herself in every way. Under such circumstances the tendencies of the mother percolated, as it were, into the child and the influence abided for ever.

Second comes association. It begins from the days of the child's toddling. Here too the responsibility of the parents is enormous. They should see that the child mixes with children brought up in a congenial atmosphere. This is the formative period of the child's life and due care should be taken to avoid its falling into bad company. If good impressions are formed the child, as he grows up, will pick his associates carefully.

Then comes the teacher. In ancient India his influence was tremendous. The pupils lived under him for a long time and therefore it was incumbent that his life should be exemplary. Though the same system of education does not prevail now it is possible that a teacher can influence his students by his life even at the present age.

Next comes contact with holy men. This is where today's youth can begin. For they cannot undo what has already happened. But they can and must make a beginning somewhere. They must create in themselves a lively interest for religion. And that can be done in two ways, by reading books and associating with holy people. Books will give theoretical knowledge but in holy men you will find the truths illustrated. Contact with them will strengthen one's belief in the scriptures, in religion and spirituality.

IV

Some aspirants try to combine *yoga* with *bhoga*, spirituality with enjoyment. Real progress in spiritual life is an impossibility if anyone thinks that in this way he can work the religious path. Sri Śankara has unambiguously put this forth in his

Vivekachudamani thus: "Whoever seeks to realize the Self by giving himself up to the nourishing of the body, is like the man who proceeds to cross a river catching hold of a crocodile, mistaking it for a log of wood."¹¹ For these two (*yoga* and *bhoga*) are like the two opposite poles of the same magnet, are like light and darkness, like fire and water. They can never come together without detriment to each other. Remember the advice Christ gave to the rich young man, when the latter had approached him with the question, 'Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?' 'Keep the commandments,' Jesus had said. 'That I have', the youth had replied and asked, 'What lack I yet?' Christ's reply to this should clarify all doubt, should set at rest all vacillation. Jesus almost seems to say, "to be good and moral and loving and kind is excellent indeed! But if there it ends, you will be a good man and no more. You would have prepared the ground to be religious but the seed is yet to be sown; you have to take the last step," when he said 'If thou wilt be perfect, go *and* sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come and follow me.'¹² "Give up", that is the last but the most important commandment of Jesus but the least followed. What does this "following me" in the text mean? To be like him. A definition of what it is to be like him is contained in his exhortation, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind."¹³ This means, to be without attachment to anything here. An illustration of it is Christ himself, which is substantiated in his saying: "Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head."¹⁴

Again, study the life of any great spiritual luminary, — a Buddha, a Śankara, a Ramakrishna, a Vivekananda. What does it teach? All these, as if, with one voice declare, "give up all that is worldly and cling to God alone". Confronted with this obvious truth the youth should abstain from committing the mistake of trying to combine *yoga* and *bhoga*.

V

To sum up: One should cultivate an intense liking for the religious life even while young. A whole-souled application to the practice, with all the vigour at one's command, is a necessity towards any achievement. It is more incumbent in the case of religion.

Swami Vivekananda had great hope in the youth of India. He wanted them to come forward not only for the material regeneration of the motherland but also for its spiritual invigoration. It was a call to serve both, viz., the mankind and oneself. Will the youth understand and respond to his call?

¹¹ *Vivekachudamani* – 84.

¹² Gospel according to St. Mathew 19.16-21.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 22.37.

¹⁴ Gospel according to St. Luke, 9.58.

SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES AND INNER TRANSFORMATION OF MAN

Swami Paratparananda

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MAN'S EXISTENCE is a fight with nature. Nature tries to limit him, to imprison him in its net. Science in the outer world and religion in the inner fight for freedom from the freaks of nature. Man manifests his vitality when he fights against a morbid set of dogmas or creeds, whether scientific or religious. He expresses intelligence when he puts forth honest doubts against set beliefs. But if he stops with this mere negative approach he misses the very fundamentals of life. He becomes a mere negative man, which is not a healthy sign of a thoughtful mind. Man's mind must have some support, some positive proposition to work upon. Whether in science or religion man takes a proposition that has already preceded him and experiments with it, before discarding it. Whereas this reasonable method is faithfully adhered to in the empirical sciences, it is sadly neglected in the religious field. The reason is, however, obvious. A man of science has to work on things external whereas a man of religion is to work on himself, on his own mind. A man of science need not necessarily be pure in character but for the man of religion nobility and purity of character are the very foundations. Those are his instruments by which he will have to work. He must be above the temptations of the world. It necessarily, therefore, follows that few are really qualified to attain that plane where they could cross the barrier of the mundane to have a peep into the transcendent. But such is man's presumption, that he thinks by mere ratiocination, empirical facts and a few experiments conducted on the body of human beings, as on guinea pigs, he would know the whole of the transcendental Truth. Rather, he believes that religious experiences are no more than some nervous diseases, produced by excessive emotionalism and are of no value at all.

There has been this allegation repeated Almost parrot-like *ad nauseum*, against religion that it 'is the opiate of the people', without even trying to plumb the depths of the religious life. Again, this statement is often supported by Freud's maxim, 'I never doubted that religious phenomena are to be understood only on the model of the neurotic symptoms of the individual'. Not satisfied with the term 'neurotic symptoms' Freud's present disciples would have it as "psychotic symptoms". It is not known whether they understand that there is something apart from the body. It is doubtful whether they believe in a mind exclusive of the body. If we follow the trend of their arguments it comes to this: where can there be any mind if there is not a body — and a gross body at that? It is a great hurdle, however, for them that they

cannot deny the dream experiences, as a result of which they have to concede a sub-conscious state for the mind. Perhaps they ignore the state of deep sleep as worth no notice as nothing phenomenal is experienced in that state.

Some modern psychiatrists have begun to experiment on human beings, to find out the effect of certain drugs, in order to prove their proposition that religious experiences are no more than some chemical changes that take place in the brain, which can be induced by drugs as well. They put forward certain statements and statistics describing the findings of their experiments. They quote from some of the sayings of some aspirants of India as well as of Christianity who seemed to have had spiritual experiences under the effect of hemp, opium, wine and the like. Undoubtedly there is some effect of these on man. He may have some experiences while under their effect but to point them out as the same as religious experience is something absurd. If these statements were from genuine seekers we have to presume that they have been distorted to suit the needs of the interpreters, if not we have to take it that the aspirants themselves were misguided. While no one denies the deadening effect of morphia on the pains of the body for the time being, the return of the pain as soon as the effect of morphia passes away is also an undeniable fact. As the drunkard experiences a certain type of enjoyment forgetting all his sorrows so too an opiate or an addict to such type of drugs may have some experiences, may find some joy. But an opiate is an opiate and to equate those experiences to those of a man of God is to say that the joy that the pig experiences in wallowing in mire is the same as that of the man who is bewitched by the beauty of a panoramic view or enthralled by a fine piece of music. What we imply by this is, that spiritual-like experiences are not the criteria of religion, but spiritual experiences are. The former are spurious, are like soap bubbles without any substance in them, hollow as the experienter himself so far as spirituality is concerned.

It is significant at this stage to note that appearances are often deceptive. Take the crow for example; how it resembles, in its build and features, the sweet song bird cuckoo! But what a difference in the cries of the two birds! The cry of one is harsh and irritating while the sound of the other is sweet and soothing. Similarly the experiences induced by drugs and the like lead man down into the realms of morbidity and later to addiction to the drug itself, which will be very difficult to get over afterwards. Often also it leads to moral turpitude and hence the ruin of the body and mind; while real spiritual experience transforms man. It is not, however, a physical transformation. To use the language of Sri Ramakrishna, 'he does not grow two horns', but his character gets ennobled.

II

How then to distinguish between the spurious and the genuine, between a charlatan and a saint? As already stated above the real spiritual person develops in character. He sheds all enmity; discards all desires; is content with whatever comes in his way unasked. He does not manifest any pomp or glamour; does not hanker for name and fame. He is always ready to help people in their troubles. He is ever immersed in the thought of the Most High. He loves all and hates none. Even the

bite of a deadly snake is a message from the Lord for him. In short he has no unripe ego in him; whatever he does goes to add to the benefit of society, nay for the benefit of mankind as a whole.

It is this unripe ego that divides man from man, society from society and nation from nation. It asserts itself in several ways. Love of power is one of them. Almost everyone wants to rule over somebody. Even in a family, a society, or a nation that is what happens – the tendency to control and to rule. But who does actually rule the hearts - of people? Swami Vivekananda once said it is the child that rules supreme in the home. And is it not a fact? So, unless we be like children, simple and straightforward, pure and unsophisticated it is impossible to gain the hearts of people. And this is possible when man has gone beyond the idea of I and mine, – a condition which is possible only when one has realized the Supreme, realized God.

On the other hand, what do we come across in the history of the nations all over the world – not only in the present times but from the beginning of history? It is strife and stress, war and bloodshed. Strife between sections of society, between the haves and the have-nots; war among nations for supremacy, for possession of land not rightfully belonging to them and the like. That is what earthly power begets --- tyranny. It is the ego – the I and mine, we and ours – that perpetrates these crimes. The ego is present in every human being in one form or other – the ego of possessions, the ego of caste, the ego of heredity, the ego of learning, the ego of race, the ego of beauty of one's person and so on. Now the purpose of religion is to turn this self-centred ego into a God-centred one, turn the unripe ego into the ripe one. That is what religious experience does. Can the experiences induced by drugs do this?

Let those who assert that religious experiences are only some chemical reactions taking place in the brain, which can also be induced by drugs, give us an example of a person who has attained to selflessness, pure and simple, who has gone beyond all desires by these drugs and then put forward his claim. If they say that they have just begun to experiment and it will take time to develop, to arrive at a perfected man through these means, is it not better to ask them not to confuse the minds of the simple folk by their unfounded arguments in the name of science, till such time that they are in a position to prove it by results? We think it will be good to do so. Also it would be good for mankind not to heed this prattle until such time but to follow the well-founded path, on which myriads of saints and sages have already travelled and who in their turn are there as beacon lights to illumine the way for humanity. Let us remember the proverb, 'Rome was not built in a day'. The Rome of character which forms the very basis of religious life cannot be formed by a few drugs. If it could be, why is there so much tension in the life of the affluent West – we mean here those who entirely depend upon matter and science for their support? Do they like to live under tension? Do they like being neurotics? Why have the tranquillizers failed to effect a lasting cure on the nervously overwrought? Until these questions are satisfactorily solved let us not be carried away by these empirical tests which prove nothing conclusively.

If the experiments are just to decry religious experience, as their purpose seems to be, such people will have to meet the challenge put forward above if they have any claim as scientists. Again there are experiences and experiences. We cannot

put them all in one category. Let us remember that this thought of drugs being able to produce peculiar experiences was not unknown in India. Witness for example what Patanjali says in the Yoga Sutras: 'Occult powers are attained by birth, drugs, *mantras*, austerities and *samadhi*.'¹ Perhaps this takes these "psycho-scientists" by surprise: that drugs can induce certain powers also, not to speak of mere vague experiences. The yogis, however, never encouraged running after these occult powers. Rather, they were cited as impediments to one's spiritual progress, as pitfalls to be avoided from one's path.

That experience which steadies man's wisdom, dispels all doubts about the existence of God, breaks all ties that bind man to this world, that alone is genuine religious experience. What is steadiness in wisdom? Sri Krishna describes it at great length in the second chapter of the *Gita*. A few characteristics of such a person can be cited here to illustrate the heights to which a spiritually advanced person rises. Sri Krishna says, 'He who is unperturbed in difficulties, and unattached to happy circumstances, from whom attachment, fear and anger have taken leave is called a man of steady wisdom.'² Probably each one of us might have experienced this type of wisdom for a little time; a time when we did not desire anything, did not feel any attraction for anything, did not fear anything, and felt an all-pervading love towards every being. But the next moment one or all of these emotions may have been set in motion. The *Gita* does not allude here to such passing phases but to a continuity of such a state when once attained. How do we know that it is a continuous state that is referred to? First of all, it is common knowledge that scriptures speak of things that are not discernible by the senses, The scriptures are to expound and explain what is beyond the ken of the ordinary human mind, beyond the experience of the generality of mankind. So it would not be to any one's purpose to repeat a well-known every day experience. Secondly, scriptures direct the way to get rid of misery and attain bliss eternal, for which man, howsoever ignorantly, strives in his own way. Thirdly, in this context Sri Krishna makes this point clear at the end of the discourse. He says: 'Attaining this state of Brahman, O Arjuna, one does not get deluded.'³ Sri Ramakrishna compares such a person to a bee that will not light on anything but a flower; that will not drink anything but honey.

III

The infatuation with which the world is besieged produces misery and it is to get out of this misery that man strives hard by various means. From the efforts of the cave man to that of the civilized person of today with the devices and appliances of science, are all to attenuate misery. Our Indian sages were aware that however much one strives in the outer world one could not reach the stage of satiety by enjoyment. The sense of misery would return redoubled once the enjoyment came to an end. In this way by sledge hammer blows, as it were, the truth, that there is no happiness in the outer world, is brought home repeatedly. 'That where one does not see another,

¹ Yoga Sutra, 4.1.

² Bhagavad Gita, Ch. II.56.

³ Ibid., II.72.

hear another, know another is the Great. And this in which there is seeing another, hearing another and knowing another is little, is insignificant. This Great is immortal, and the little is perishable.⁴ There is no happiness in this little; the Great alone is bliss. That alone is to be known,⁵ says the *Chāndogyopanishad*. So, the ancient sages explored the realm of the spirit and were unusually and amply rewarded. They reached a state from whence they could look with an eye of equanimity on pain and pleasure, from where everything on earth and heavens seemed to pulsate with the breath of the One Conscious Principle; nay they saw it as one solid mass of Consciousness, undivided and impenetrable. They saw that they too were not separate from it. They became calm, and fearless, for they perceived not a second thing. It is from a second thing alone that fear creeps into a being,⁶ explains the Upanishad. That is the transformation that man undergoes. Outwardly he will resemble any ordinary human being. But in him the knowledge of the Supreme will be like a blazing fire.

Let us now conclude with what Sri Ramakrishna, the most modern and most liberal of the Spiritual Doctors, says about religious experiences: "Sivanath once said that one loses one's head' by thinking too much of God. 'What?' said I. 'Can anyone ever become unconscious by thinking of Consciousness? God is of the nature of Eternity, Purity, and Consciousness. Through His Consciousness one becomes conscious of everything; through His Intelligence the whole world appears intelligent.' Shivanath said that some Europeans had gone insane, that they had 'lost their heads' by thinking too much about God. In their case it may be true; for they think of worldly things. There is a line in a song: 'Divine fervour fills my body and robs me of consciousness.' The consciousness referred to here is the consciousness of the outer world." Now, just as you call in a physician for consultation when you are ill and not a carpenter, or a blacksmith, or a renowned dramatist, or a scholar, so too to cure us from the disease of worldliness the advice of the spiritual doctors, i.e. the saints and sages, is alone to be resorted to and not that of any and everyone. The assurance of Sri Ramakrishna, quoted above, should set at rest all doubts as regards the validity and veracity of religious experiences and the immense good that could come out of them.

⁴ Chandogyopanishad, 7.24.1.

⁵ Ibid., 7.23.1.

⁶ Brihadaranyaka Up. 1.4.2.